How to Cope With MS Numbness and Tingling

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Dealing with MS Numbness and Tingling

Numbness, tingling, and pins-and-needles sensations are common early warning signs of MS, but these discomforts can stick around long after diagnosis. It may begin with annoying episodes of a numb finger or loss of sensation in one area of the face, but for some, the tingling can become so uncomfortable and distracting that it begins to interfere with daily life.

Eventually, severe MS numbness and tingling can interfere with mobility, dressing, and an independent lifestyle in general, so it’s important to understand how it affects your body and how to control its effects as soon as possible.

MS Numbness, Tingling, and Nerve Sensitivity

With multiple sclerosis itching, numbness, prickling, and tingling are not uncommon found together – up to 50 percent of patients will experience some sort of sensory problem like this, known as paresthesia, a disturbance in feeling. When these sensations become uncomfortable or painful – they are known as dysesthesia – and can be traced to lesions in the central nervous system.

MS affects the nerves and their ability to transmit information quickly and accurately. When the nerves that are responsible for transmitting sensations fail to communicate properly, a specific area of the body could experience a strange sensation or lose sensation completely.

Dysesthesias like burning or tingling can make even the lightest touch painful, which often calls for medication to calm and control the unpleasant feeling.

MS Numbness Relief: Tips for Easing the Discomfort

In many cases, numbness and tingling will disappear on their own, and they may not come back for months or years. Unfortunately, other MS sufferers must learn to live with persistent tingling. Although there’s no overnight cure, there are ways to relieve some of the intensity and frequency with a few changes to their treatment plan:

Get the Right Medication

Traditional pain relievers may not solve your skin discomforts, especially if the tingling or itch is severe.

Certain anti-seizure medications have been found to calm the numbness and tingling more effectively, so speak with your doctor about gabapentin (which goes by the brand name Neurontin) or pregabalin (widely known as Lyrica).

Antidepressants or steroids are other options, and although disease-modifying drugs (DMDs) won’t eradicate

your symptoms, they can ward off new paresthesias.

Relax Often

Stress can play a big role in the extent and severity of paresthesia, and you stand a much better chance of overcoming stress when you use a number of relaxation techniques.

If your tingling isn't too painful to the touch, therapeutic massage can bring relief to the area, and the simple act of remaining still and relaxed for a length of time can go far to reducing the strain on muscles and nerves.

You don't necessarily need to visit a professional to get the relaxing relief your body needs. Try to meditate on your own time, or even just take a 5 or 10-minute break to close your eyes, clear your thoughts and focus on your breathing. You'll likely find that your discomforts begin to diminish, even if they don't go away completely.

Be Careful and Attentive

When tingling affects the face or extremities, it can interfere with important muscle movements and lead to injury. You'll need to pay closer attention to your gait (watch where you step), and lift, hold, and chew more deliberately, so you don't inadvertently hurt yourself while performing a simple task.

Learn Compensatory Strategies

A visit to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist can provide some very helpful insight into living with the sensory disruptions of MS. They can teach you strategies to work around your difficulties rather than simply try to defeat the symptoms, which can spare you frustration and help you establish more control. Visual cues, range of motion exercises and alternative ways of moving your body or performing tasks can make it easier to live and work with your paresthesia.

Unfortunately, many people – including some medical professionals – tend to shrug off the discomforts of MS paresthesia, but anyone who lives with constant tingling or burning knows how the distraction can have widespread emotional, physical and social effects.

As is the case with most MS symptoms, early action is vital for better control and relief, so don't let your peers or medical team downplay the discomfort. Seek a second or third opinion from a neurologist, and consult with other MS patients that have struggled with tingling sensations to see if you can learn from their experience.

Try not to focus on a complete cure, since nerve pain and damage is often difficult to understand, let alone reverse. Instead, think optimistically and focus on the improvements you can make.

Reducing your tingling, relieving the discomfort in one area, or finding a way to work around your pain rather than inflame it are all victories, and those little victories can add up to big improvements in your quality of life.