

TITLE 1: "Ask the Doctor"

TITLE 2:

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KEYWORDS:

- Medical news/updates
- Symptoms

ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: A question from a patient about peripheral neuropathy.

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Ask the Doctor

Q. *I have been diagnosed with restless legs syndrome by the neurologist who has been treating me for Parkinson's disease. Over the last 2 years, I've developed another symptom that neither my neurologist nor my primary physician can explain. My toes feel warm or hot most of the time, and often look red and swollen. Is this a common symptom in people with RLS? Can you suggest any treatment for this?*



A. Peripheral neuropathy is a disorder that causes dysfunction of the nerves outside the brain and spinal cord. The most common pattern is for it to start in the feet. Patients with peripheral neuropathy may complain of burning, tingling, or numbness in the feet. The smallest-diameter nerve fibers carry messages about pain and temperature. Therefore, burning pain in the feet can be due to such a small-fiber neuropathy with very little else found on examination, and normal electrical tests of the feet. In many patients with peripheral neuropathy, no cause can be found, but such diseases as diabetes need to be excluded. However, not all patients with burning feet have a definite peripheral neuropathy; local causes can be explored by consultation

with a podiatrist. In some patients, the burning feet can be an unexplained chronic pain problem. More sophisticated tests to rule out a small fiber peripheral neuropathy would include autonomic testing for sweat production in the feet. Finally, RLS itself can occasionally present with symptoms largely in the feet and less in the legs. But then the discomfort must fulfill the criteria for RLS (worse at rest, associated with a desire to move, relief with movement, etc.). Peripheral neuropathy can be associated with RLS. It is important to separate out the different discomforts, as the treatment for each may differ.

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