

RAYNAUD'S

DISEASE

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IMPORTANT

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Introduction

Raynaud's is a common disorder in which the small blood vessels in the extremities are over-sensitive to changes in temperature. It affects between 3 to 20% of the adult population worldwide, mainly females, and there may be as many as ten million sufferers in the UK. It is also referred to as Raynaud's syndrome, Raynaud's phenomenon or just "Raynaud's".

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Symptoms

The symptoms of Raynaud's may cause severe pain, discomfort, and problems with hand function. However, for the vast majority of sufferers, Raynaud's is a benign primary condition which may interfere with the individual's daily activities but does not cause any long term damage to the extremities.

Symptoms include:

- Fingers, hands, toes, feet and other extremities feel cold
- white or bluish colour
- numbness in the toes, fingers, nose and other extremities
- loss of sensory perception
- mild swelling
- redness with sensations of throbbing and/or tingling once blood flow returns to normal

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Discoloration

The discoloration associated with Raynaud's often comes in what is known as a three-phase-sequence - the skin turns from white to blue to red.



*Photo courtesy of the Mayo Foundation
for Medical Education and Research.*

First, the blood vessels spasm and reduce the flow of blood, turning the affected area white. After a period without oxygen, the area begins to turn blue. Finally, the spasm stops and the blood vessels reopen. Blood rushes to the area, turning it red. The cycle can be quite painful to sufferers.



*Photo courtesy of the International Scleroderma Network
at www.sclero.org.*

Types

There are two types of Raynaud's. It can either be:

- primary: the condition develops by itself (this is the most common type)
- secondary: the condition develops in association with another health condition

The actual causes of primary Raynaud's are unknown. However, 1 in 10 people with primary Raynaud's will go on to develop a condition associated with secondary Raynaud's such as lupus.

Most cases of secondary Raynaud's are associated with conditions where the immune system is compromised and starts attacking healthy tissue.

Secondary Raynaud's causes a more severe restriction of blood supply so it carries a higher risk of causing complications such as ulcers, scarring, and in the most serious of cases of tissue necrosis (death), which is also known as gangrene.

Conditions that may cause Secondary Raynaud's include:

- smoking
- eating disorders (e.g. bulimia and anorexia)
- hashimoto's thyroiditis
- scleroderma, a condition that causes hardening of connective tissue
- systemic lupus: when the immune system attacks many different parts of the body causing a range of symptoms, such as tiredness, joint pain and skin rashes
- rheumatoid arthritis - when the immune system attacks the joints causing pain and swelling
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- other diseases that affect the arteries including atherosclerosis
- the use of beta blockers
- certain chemotherapy agents
- some over the counter cold and flu medications can also predispose an individual to Raynaud's

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Treatment

In many cases it may be possible to control the symptoms of Raynaud's using self-care techniques such as avoiding the cold, wearing warm gloves, and using hypnosis and relaxation techniques when feeling stressed.

The Raynaud's Association recommends taking proactive steps to prevent spasms, including stopping smoking, and dressing warmly in layers. When it is felt that an episode is coming on despite the preventative measures, the individual should swing their arms around in circles to keep the blood circulating, or rub the hands together under warm water.

If the condition is severe an allopathic practitioner can advise on the different types of drugs available, which include vasodilators (chemical drugs which open up the small blood vessels). Often, several may have to be tried before one is found that works.

A natural approach would include tissue salts, specific vitamins (A, B-Complex (100 mg), C (1,000 mg-3,000 mg), E (natural mixed tocopherols, 400 mg)), fish oil, evening primrose oil, rosemary,

gingko biloba, cinnamon (500 mcg of cinnamon extract), and ginger. Such measures seem to help, and they are freely available without a prescription.

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