

Raynaud's Phenomenon & You

What is it?



Raynaud's Phenomenon (Raynaud's) is a condition involving the circulation or blood flow. In people with Raynaud's, exposure to cold temperatures causes small blood vessels to "clamp down" or spasm. This reduces the amount of blood flowing to the hands or feet, causing them to turn pale or white. Upon re-warming, the skin can turn blue or red before going back to normal. It usually affects younger women.

Attacks of Raynaud's are usually triggered by exposure to cold temperatures. Previous injuries, stressful situations, repetitive actions or vibrations can also trigger Raynaud's. Smoking can also trigger spasm in your small blood vessels. This can make Raynaud's symptoms worse.

There are two types of Raynaud's: primary and secondary. In most people, Raynaud's happens all by itself and there is no other underlying disease. This is called primary Raynaud's. Raynaud's is also seen in people with other types of diseases such as systemic sclerosis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and Sjögren's syndrome. This is called secondary Raynaud's. This type of Raynaud's tends to be more severe and can get worse over time.

At this time, we don't fully understand what causes blood vessels to become more sensitive to cold temperatures or other triggers.



Raynaud's Phenomenon is like a clamp squeezing off blood supply to your fingers and toes

What is it going to do to me?



The areas most commonly affected by Raynaud's are the fingers and toes, but sometimes the nose, ears, lips and nipples can also be affected.

During an attack of Raynaud's, blood flow to the fingers and toes is reduced. This can cause them to turn cold and to feel numb. It can be quite painful when the areas re-warm and a burning or tingling feeling may be present. Attacks can vary from a few minutes to several hours, but most attacks last around 5 to 10 minutes.

Secondary Raynaud's can be more severe and cause painful ulcers on the fingertips.

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RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about Raynaud's Phenomenon and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.

Raynaud's is more than just cold fingers and toes. During an attack, small blood vessels in your extremities react to cold temperatures by "clamping down" or tightening up. This reduces blood supply to your fingers and toes, causing them to turn white or pale and to feel numb. When your body starts to re-warm, the clamp opens up and the proper flow of blood returns to your fingers and toes. This can cause them to turn blue or red and can be painful.

What can I do about it?



There are effective treatments for Raynaud's. Even if they don't cure Raynaud's, they can make it much more comfortable to live with the condition.

If you have Raynaud's or think you might have it, seeing your family doctor should be a priority. Oftentimes, your family doctor can help you effectively manage Raynaud's symptoms. If symptoms are more severe, you may be referred to a rheumatologist. This is a specialist doctor who is an expert in treating arthritis and other types of autoimmune diseases.

One of the best things you can do to manage Raynaud's is to keep your body warm. When your whole body is warm, it's easier for your heart to pump warm blood to your extremities. Wear long underwear, sweaters, scarves, mittens and socks to keep warm. Wear gloves or mittens when handling cold objects.

Medications are used when keeping your body warm and avoiding triggers isn't sufficient to control your symptoms. There are a number of effective medications for Raynaud's that can be discussed with your doctor.

Here are some other recommendations on what you should do:

- **Learn as much as you can about the disease**
- **Keep your body warm**
- **Avoid stress and learn to cope with emotionally stressful situations**
- **If you are a smoker with Raynaud's, quitting can be one of the best things you can do for your overall health**
- **If you're taking the oral contraceptive pill, let your doctor know**