

Cold intolerance after a hand injury (page 1 of 3)



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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Cold intolerance is an abnormal reaction to cold and an exaggerated response to a normal stimulus. It is a common complication of hand injuries, especially where damage to a nerve has occurred.

When you are in a cold environment you could feel pain, discomfort, stiffness, pins and needles, tingling or changes in skin colour. One or more of these symptoms may be present. Some patients report that these symptoms can occur with mild cold, when handling cold objects or with a slight change of temperature. An example of this is standing under a shady tree on a hot day or wind blowing over your hand.

Most patients experience problems with cold intolerance during the winter following their hand injury. For some people, this may be some months after the original injury and come as an unpleasant surprise. You need to be reassured that it is a common problem and does not indicate that anything is going wrong with the recovery of your hand.

How long will it last?

This is very difficult to predict. For some patients cold intolerance may be a problem for only the first winter after their hand injury. Other patients may continue to experience cold intolerance for many years or the rest of their life, although possibly with some reduction in the severity of symptoms.

Smoking is more likely to make the problem worse, due to the negative effect that smoking has on the blood supply to your hand.

How can you help yourself?

Where possible, keep your hand warm – try not to let your hand get cold in the first place. There are many companies that sell thermal clothing and other products to help manage cold intolerance. We do not endorse any company in particular and are not able to take any responsibility for products purchased. However, below is a list of ideas and resources that our patients have found useful in managing cold intolerance. We hope this information may help you too.

Thermal clothing

The main way that you can help to reduce the symptoms of cold intolerance is by keeping warm – keeping both your hand and your body warm. It is important to wear sufficient clothes to keep your body warm such as body warmers, thermal vests and woollen jumpers. This may be more than you would normally wear. If you keep your body warm, your

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circulation will not need to divert the blood supply from your arms and hands to keep your internal organs warm. As a result, this will ensure that the blood supply to your hand is better maintained. The web site below will give you one example of the range of products available: www.damart.co.uk

Thermal insulating gloves will help to keep your hands warm. There are many commercial gloves available, especially from outdoor shops such as garden centres, fishing shops, diving centres and chandlers. These are often described as '**Thinsulate**' gloves. Thinsulate is a trademark of the 3M Corporation for a type of synthetic fibre thermal insulation layer. Thinsulate can be used to line a wide variety of different styles of glove such as wool, neoprene and deer skin.

However, there are also many specialist gloves. **Silver gloves** have been recommended to us by our patients. The gloves are produced by TDS Healthcare Ltd, who claim that the silver helps to reduce heat loss. The gloves are lightweight and easy to wear. They can be worn as a liner under other gloves. For further information go to the following web site: www.tdshealthcare.co.uk

Sealskinz gloves have also been recommended to us by our patients. Sealskinz make a range of gloves both men and women for different types of outdoor activity, such as cycling or shooting. The gloves have the advantage of being waterproof and breathable. Some of these styles of gloves are easily available from shops specialising in outdoor clothing. Otherwise from the internet, including Amazon. The Sealskinz web site is as follows: www.sealskinz.com/UK

Electrically heated gloves use either a standard, rechargeable or lithium battery to heat to the glove, through a network of small electrical wires – rather like an electric blanket. The gloves may be heated in the palm only or include heating along the fingers. The gloves are often designed for use by motorcyclists and come in waterproof fabrics. There are a wide range of products and companies on the market. The web site below will help you to see an example of electrically heated gloves from one company: www.gerbings.co.uk

Wrist bands can be worn to help improve the circulation to the hand and have been used for many years as part of folk lore. However, we do not understand how they work. Wrist bands are particularly useful for people who cannot get normal gloves on their hands, due to deformity. One type of commercially available wrist band is described below:

'**Cosy Cuffs**'. These are sheep skin wrist bands, which need to fit snugly to work effectively. The sheep wool is worn next to the skin – fastened by Velcro. For further information for cuffs for both men and women, please search the internet, where they are sold by various different companies.

Heat pads can be a very convenient way of warming up your hand. There are different styles of heat pads that are easily available from outdoor shops and chemists; however, many consist of re-useable hot gel. The gel pads work by pressing a small button on the pad which sets up a chemical reaction inside. The chemical reaction releases heat for a period of 20 – 30 minutes, which can be sufficient to give some relief from pain symptoms. The gel pads are usually designed to be recharged such as by boiling them up in a pan of water, so that they

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can be used again. However, do be careful and check that the areas of skin that have little or no sensation do not burn. For an example of heat pads go to www.gelert.com

There is another condition where patients experience problems with cold hands – **Reynaud's**. Whilst cold intolerance is a different clinical problem to Reynaud's, you may find some of the practical ideas and solutions for managing cold hands used by Reynaud's sufferers very helpful. For further information go to the web site: www.raynauds.org.uk

You will need to experiment with all the different options available to find a solution that works for you.