



# **Raynaud's Phenomenon - Your questions answered** (page 1 of 3)

This leaflet should be read along with advice given to you from your doctor or nurse.

## **What is Raynaud's?**

Raynaud's is a condition where the blood supply to the extremities, usually fingers and toes but sometimes also the nose or ears, occasionally becomes much reduced by spasms in the small arteries. During an attack the affected part becomes white and dead looking, then turns blue as the tissues use up the oxygen and then finally bright red as the arteries relax and fresh blood rushes in. Primary Raynaud's can vary from a very mild form, being little more than a nuisance, to a severe form requiring treatment. Anyone of any age can suffer from Raynaud's, but teenage girls are most commonly affected. The condition may reduce in severity after the menopause.

Attacks seem to be brought on by a change in temperature, rather than just cold exposure, so although worse in winter, the effects of Raynaud's can also occur in summer. Stress and anxiety and using vibrating tools such as a road drill can also bring on an attack.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

The history of the disease is most important. Blood tests may also help.

## **Is it hereditary?**

There is no evidence that Raynaud's is directly inherited. There may however be a genetic predisposition, so that the chances of being affected are greater if a relative has the same problem.

## **What causes it?**

Frequently no cause can be found and this is known as primary Raynaud's. Secondary Raynaud's is associated with other diseases such as scleroderma, rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Your doctor or nurse will discuss these with you in the clinic

## **What can I do to help myself?**

### **Stop smoking**

The single most effective thing you can do to improve your symptoms is to stop smoking.

Tobacco is harmful because it causes the blood vessels to narrow, so that

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**Tel: 01722 336262 Ext. 4937**

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

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less blood reaches the fingers.

If you are a smoker you must make a sincere and determined effort to stop completely. For help with this you can contact your GP surgery or use the helpline mentioned at the end of this leaflet.

## Keep warm

Eating and drinking can help keep you warm. Try to eat lots of small meals to maintain your energy. High protein foods, milk, fish and fresh vegetables are best. Hot meals and plenty of hot drinks, especially before going to bed are useful.

## Diet and medication

Some people have found a change in diet to include more oily fish or a supplement of fish oils helpful in controlling symptoms.

Caffeine (found in coffee, tea and cola) has been found to trigger symptoms in some people. Try cutting out caffeine for a few weeks to see if your symptoms reduce. Amphetamines and cocaine may also make the symptoms worse.

Some medications used to treat other conditions may make symptoms worse. If you suspect this may be happening to you, do not stop taking your medicine but discuss this with your GP to see if there are any alternatives.

## Exercise

Gentle exercise will help your circulation. Try to avoid sitting for long periods, instead get up and walk around the room, moving arms and legs to maintain the circulation. Do try not to let your fingers and toes get cold and in cold weather take exercise indoors.

## Clothing

Always cover up before going out and avoid sudden changes in temperature.

Hands and feet should always be adequately covered, and gloves or mittens are essential in cold weather. A scarf should be used to keep the face warm in cold weather and a hat and several layers of clothing should be used to keep the head and trunk warm. Feet are especially prone to cooling; therefore a good pair of socks is essential. If your clothes and footwear get wet they should be changed as soon as possible. Tight clothing should also be avoided as it may restrict blood flow. Portable heat packs and battery heated socks and gloves may be useful if your symptoms are severe. A list of suppliers can be obtained from the Raynaud's Association (see the address at the end of this leaflet).

## Control Stress

If you have found that stressful situations trigger an attack, you may benefit from learning to recognise and manage your emotional response to stress. Speak to your GP about this.

## During an attack

Try to warm your hands or feet by running warm water over them or soaking in a bowl of warm water. Taking time to relax will also help to end the attack.

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## What else can be done to relieve my symptoms?

The doctor may prescribe a vasodilator, which is a medicine that relaxes the blood vessels. If this treatment fails and your symptoms are severe, you may be referred to a specialist for an operation called a sympathectomy. This is an operation where the aim is to cut the nerves that cause the arteries to constrict.

## What is involved in the operation?

The operation is usually carried out as a keyhole procedure, and you will usually be able to go home on the same day, providing you have a friend or relative, who is able to stay with you overnight. Your doctor will discuss whether this operation will be of benefit to you.

## You should see a doctor if

You are worried about your symptoms. You must get medical advice if your attacks occur only on one side of your body (one hand or foot) or if the attacks result in sores or ulcers on your fingers or toes.

## Further advice and information

### Smoking

Smoking quitline:

0800 022 4 332

[smokefree.nhs.uk](http://smokefree.nhs.uk)

NHS Stop Smoking Services are free and very successful. You are four times more likely to quit with a trained counsellor and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) than trying to give up on your own.

### The Raynaud's Association

112 Crewe Road

Alsager

Cheshire, ST7 2JA

Tel no: 01270 872776

[www.raynauds.org.uk](http://www.raynauds.org.uk)

The Raynaud's Association is a national charity committed to increasing awareness of this disease and raising money for essential research to determine cause, enhance treatment and find a cure.

email: [info@raynauds.org.uk](mailto:info@raynauds.org.uk)