



What is Raynaud's Disease

Raynaud's disease (aka Raynaud's Phenomenon) is a medical condition in which the arteries in the fingers and toes become suddenly narrowed in response to cold exposure, causing the digits to turn sequentially white, blue, or red. It is named after the French physician, Maurice Raynaud, who first described it. Although the fingers of healthy individuals may become pale in response to severe cold, the effect is exaggerated in individuals with Raynaud's symptoms, so that even mild cold exposure, such as within one's home, can cause significant symptoms. Raynaud's symptoms have been estimated to be present in as many as one in twenty people.

Primary "Raynaud's disease" refers to vasospasm (severe, temporary narrowing of the arteries) that happens with cold or stress without any other related medical condition. Some people have other medical illnesses, such as scleroderma or systemic lupus erythematosus. In these cases, "Raynaud's phenomenon" is used to describe vasospasm of the digits in response to cold.

Eighty percent of sufferers are women, and as many as 5 percent of the U.S. population has Raynaud's disease.

Symptoms of Raynaud's Disease

During attacks, the small vessels that supply blood to the skin in the hands, and sometimes the toes, nose, or ears constrict, resulting in numbness and a pale or bluish tint.

Risk Factors for Raynaud's Disease

Raynaud's disease affects women more often than men, occurs more commonly in youth (between ages 5 and 35 years) and may occur more frequently in members of the same family. The cause is not known.

How is Raynaud's Disease Diagnosed?

The physician should evaluate the patient for other illnesses associated with Raynaud's phenomenon. These include: connective tissue disorders (lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and scleroderma), vibration injury from the use of power tools, thoracic outlet syndrome and other arterial diseases that compromise blood flow to the hands. Test for secondary Raynaud's may include non-invasive blood flow studies of the hand and arm, and a blood test called an ANA or rheumatoid factor.

Raynaud's Disease Treatment Options

The best treatment is to avoid the cause of the attacks. Most individuals can achieve satisfactory control of the frequency and severity of attacks by avoiding cold, using protective garments (including extra layers of clothing: hats, mittens, and warm socks and shoes), or occasionally taking medications that relax the arteries. Usually, a decrease of attacks is achievable, but there is no "cure" for Raynaud's. Some helpful suggestions for Raynaud's disease include:

- Avoid abrupt changes in temperature, especially going from warm air to air conditioning.
- Do not go outside without a coat and mittens (gloves allow more cold air to get between the fingers). Wear a hat.
- Use mittens to take anything out of the freezer.
- Do not smoke.

What You Can Do

Some helpful suggestions for Raynaud's phenomenon:

- Keep your hands from getting cold
- Do not use vibrating tools
- Wear mittens instead of gloves
- Avoid excessive stress
- See your doctor if you get worse or if you notice a finger sore