



What is Raynaud's Disease

Raynaud's Disease (also called Raynaud's Phenomenon) is a medical condition. 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. Even mild cold exposure can cause significant symptoms. Eighty percent of sufferers are women, and as many as 5 percent of the U.S. population has Raynaud's disease.

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. The cause is not known.

Symptoms

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.

Diagnosis

Patients are evaluated 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.

Treatment

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. While a decrease of attacks is achievable, 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, hat or mittens (gloves allow more cold air to get between the fingers)
- Use mittens to take anything out of the freezer
- Do not smoke

Risk Factors

- Affects more women than men
- Occurs more commonly in youth (between ages 5 and 35 years)
- May occur more frequently in members of the same family

Prevention

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