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## Cold Hands May Mean More Than Warm Heart

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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'Tis the season for cold hands but for one in 20 people, it's more than a winter inconvenience. The chilly weather triggers an uncomfortable vascular disorder called Raynaud's Syndrome.

A form of vasculitis, the small arteries of the fingers and toes constrict in response to cold. This vasospasm decreases oxygen flow and results in digits that become numb and turn pale, sometimes progressing to blue, in response to cold temperature changes or emotional stress. Once the skin warms up, it turns red and imparts either a pins-and-needles, stinging or throbbing sensation. Swelling may be present too. This condition can affect the nose, lips, and earlobes as well.

The reason blood vessels react so strongly to cold temperature or stress isn't fully understood. Diagnosis is commonly made by the presentation of symptoms, as well as ruling out other possible medical causes. There are two types of Raynaud's – primary and secondary. Primary is the most common form and is also called Raynaud's disease. The age of onset is between 15 and 30. Secondary is referred to as Raynaud's phenomenon and develops because of another underlying health condition. Examples of these possibilities include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, scleroderma, carpal tunnel syndrome, and certain medications, such as those for high blood pressure or migraines. Although the less prevalent form, it tends to be more severe. Onset is usually around mid-life.

There isn't a cure for Raynaud's; however, medicine to relax the arteries can be prescribed, especially during the winter months. There are several steps that can be taken to reduce the frequency and severity of attacks. For many individuals, the following lifestyle changes are enough to manage their symptoms.

**Quit smoking.** Smoking and vaping restrict circulation in the body.

**Dress to maintain a warm body temperature.** When your body feels chilled, it will shunt blood away from the fingers and toes.

**Protect hands and feet from the cold.** This includes water, taking something out of the freezer, and exposure to cold air or air conditioning. If your nose and ears are affected, then be sure to cover them too.

**Pay attention to the car temperature.** Warm the car in the winter. It may also be helpful to purchase a car with a heated steering wheel. In the summer, try to avoid using air conditioning and roll down the windows instead.

**Sip with care.** Use drinking glasses that have a handle or that are insulated to prevent your hands from becoming cold.

**Avoid trauma, vibration, or repetitive actions to the hands.** This may include using power tools, excessive typing, or playing the piano.

**Engage in productive outlets for coping with stress.** Exercise is an excellent choice as it improves circulation. Relaxation techniques do the same. Sometimes despite your best efforts, a Raynaud's episode can occur. When in the midst of an attack, you can oversee it by slowly and gently warming the fingers, toes, and other bodily parts. This can be accomplished by returning indoors if outside in the cold weather, wiggling the fingers and toes or placing your hands beneath your armpits, massaging the hands and feet, and running warm, not hot, water over your hands and feet.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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