



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS™

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

Raynaud's Disease

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What is Raynaud's disease?

Raynaud's disease (also referred to as Raynaud's phenomenon) is a condition where the blood vessels open and close too much in response to temperature and stress. When someone with Raynaud's is exposed to cold temperatures, their blood vessels will get smaller and cause pain and the skin will turn white or blue. Raynaud's can occur in the hands, feet, nose, ears and the tip of the tongue.



Raynaud's disease causes fingers to turn white or blue when exposed to cold temperatures

What are the symptoms of Raynaud's disease?

People with Raynaud's will experience pain and skin changes in response to various temperatures or stress. When exposed to cold temperatures, the skin may turn white or blue because the vessels in the hand are narrowed. When they attempt to warm the hand, the vessels will widen quickly and blood will rush in to the hand, causing the hand to turn red. Pain may go with these temperature changes.

What causes Raynaud's disease?

There are two types of Raynaud's disease, primary and secondary. Primary Raynaud's has no known cause at this time. Secondary Raynaud's is a result of trauma or injury. People with scleroderma have a high likelihood of experiencing Raynaud's phenomenon.

What is the treatment for Raynaud's disease?

The treatment for Raynaud's initially focuses on symptom management. Those with Raynaud's should keep the temperature of their hands controlled when they are in cold or hot environments. The doctor may also prescribe medication to help keep vessels open. If the person is a smoker, he or she will be advised to stop immediately because nicotine narrows blood vessels and reduces blood flow.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist can assist people in finding gloves or other garments to help keep the temperature of their hands regulated. The therapist will provide education on the disease and offer strategies for reducing the frequency and intensity of symptoms. They may also provide advice on lifestyle changes that can prevent vessel narrowing, such as reducing caffeine intake. A hand therapist can also help determine specific triggers and offer activity and environmental modifications.



Without gloves or other garments, cold-weather activities, such as scraping ice off a windshield, can trigger symptoms of Raynaud's disease

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.