

Information for patients

North East Essex Community Services Collaborative

Chilblains

What are chilblains?

A chilblain is a condition which results from an extreme reaction of the blood vessels upon exposure to the cold. In cold temperatures, blood vessels in the skin constrict in an attempt to conserve heat. In some instances, the area can become pale or blue.

On returning to warmth, the blood vessels dilate, causing swelling and inflammation. This can leave areas of skin red, itchy, with a burning sensation and/or tender to the touch.

The elderly and very young are most vulnerable. Chilblains usually appear on the extremities – fingers, toes and ears.

If a chilblain develops

- They usually clear up on their own. You may need to see your GP or a practice nurse if they do not go away, or reoccur frequently.
- Don't scratch them. Soothing lotions such as Calamine may help ease any discomfort.
- If the skin is broken, apply an antiseptic dressing.
- Keep your extremities warm.

How to prevent chilblains

- Keep your whole body warm. Avoid extremes in temperature change where possible (avoid hot water bottles or putting your feet on a radiator, for example).
- Exercise will help to encourage the circulation to your extremities.

- Wear fleece-lined footwear that comes up over your ankles to retain the heat.
- Avoid smoking and caffeinated drinks, as this can affect the blood flow to your fingers and toes.

Raynaud's disease/phenomenon

Raynaud's disease/phenomenon is another condition that can cause fingers to go cold, white or discoloured. It is often linked to medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and is more frequent in cold weather. The symptoms of Raynaud's may last from a few minutes to a few hours. Advice is the same as that given for chilblains.

Further information

For further information, visit <https://rcpod.org.uk/common-foot-problems/chilblains>

www.nhs.uk/conditions/chilblains

www.nhs.uk/conditions/raynauds



Please ask if you need this leaflet in an alternative format.