

If you have Raynaud's it is very likely that your fingers will change colour at any time during the year depending on where you are and what you are doing. Just touching a cold milk bottle without using protective gloves can cause the fingers to go numb. Air conditioning can also be a problem or a cold wind on a hot beach can have a similar affect. Remember that it is the change in temperature which is the trigger rather than simply the cold.

EXERCISE

Regular movement and exercise helps to keep your skin flexible and maintains better blood flow. This doesn't mean that one has to go to a gym or health club in order to keep fit or do drastic exercises. Simple measures such as making wide circles or windmills with your arms can be effective.

Stress balls can be an effective way of exercising the hands when sitting or watching television.

Try to avoid sitting down for long periods of time. Get up and walk around the room, moving arms and legs to stimulate the circulation. If possible learn a few basic exercises which are within your physical limits. Should the cold cause you to lose feeling in your fingers and toes, reheat them slowly or you may do more damage and experience considerable pain. In cold weather exercise indoors using an exercise bike or just try going up and downstairs several times. If there is a swimming pool with warm water nearby, swimming is a great form of exercise. Some pools have special sessions for people with disabilities and make the water warm at certain times. It may be worth asking at your local leisure centre.

DIET

There is as yet, no satisfactory medical evidence that diet makes any difference to Raynaud's but it is always sensible to avoid foods which upset you or to which you are allergic. Your body needs plenty of warming 'fuel'. A bowl of hot porridge or cereal with warm milk makes a good start to the day and aim to eat several small meals to maintain your energy heat levels. It is important to have at least one hot meal a day and not go without food for a long time. A healthy diet should include fresh fruit and vegetables. Foods should be high in nutritional value and low in volume. Good sources of protein and energy are bread, milk, fish, eggs, potatoes and baked beans. If reflux is a problem, fatty foods, spices, tea, coffee and alcohol should be avoided as these can make it worse. It is known that occasionally some patients with Raynaud's have weakness in the muscles of the oesophagus and this can cause swallowing problems.

CLOTHING

It is not just in the winter that one needs to be aware of keeping warm. Often in the summer, even in a hot climate, air conditioning can cause an attack. It is worth taking a pair of lightweight gloves on holiday and a shawl or wrap to put around your shoulders in the evenings when the temperature drops.

Raynaud's phenomenon does not always require drug treatment. Keeping warm by wearing thermal or silk underwear, body warmers, muffs, silk glove and sock liners and fur lined boots can produce immediate benefit. Wearing several thin layers of clothing will provide more efficient insulation than one thick layer. Warm clothing before wearing, either in an airing cupboard overnight or on a radiator. This can really make a difference when going out on a cold morning. It is very important to protect the organs of the body and to cover the head when going out.

DON'T SMOKE!

Anyone with Raynaud's should know that smoking just one cigarette can reduce the body temperature by 1 degree over a 20 minute period. If you also have scleroderma, smoking can affect your breathing and damage your lungs.