



Podiatry

# Chilblains

Chilblains (which also go by the medical name 'perniosis') are more common in older people, but anyone can be affected. They are most common in colder environments, especially when the climate is damp.

## Causes and risk factors

Chilblains are caused when your blood circulation responds abnormally to cold temperature, particularly when conditions are also damp or humid. The cold causes patchy but intense swelling in the deep layer of the skin, triggering the immune system cells to flood around the blood vessels, which also become swollen.

## Symptoms

Symptoms develop 12 to 24 hours after exposure to the cold. The extremities become very itchy, then swollen and red. Painful, burning reddish purple plaques or lumps form and there may also be blisters and ulcers in more severe cases.

## Prevention

Although a number of different medical treatments have been tried, there is little reliable evidence to show that they work and it is for this reason that prevention is most important. It is important to make sure that your fingers and toes stay warm. So always carry a pair of cotton gloves with you and long socks often provide more warmth to the feet than short ones.

Regular exercise, not smoking and a well balanced diet are essential for strong and healthy circulation.

Make sure that your shoes fit well and feel comfortable. If they rub the skin may become damaged or infected making it more vulnerable to damage from chilblains.

## Self-care following cold exposure

Many people rest their hands or feet against a radiator to warm them up when they are cold, but reheating rapidly like this can cause damage to tissues already stressed by the cold and can trigger chilblains. It is best to warm cold hands and feet up slowly. Alternating putting them in and out of warm water then cold water is one easy way of re-warming them safely. Another is to rub your wrists together to stimulate the circulation to the hands.

## Treatment

Some people develop frequent and severe chilblains and need medication to keep the blood vessels open, maintaining blood flow to the extremities in the cold. Frequent episodes of severe chilblains might also be a sign of an underlying medical problem such as a connective tissue disorder (for example systemic lupus erythematosus.)

## Advice especially for you

Your podiatrist today is:

They have suggested that you also try the following:

## Contact us

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Website: [www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/podiatry](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/podiatry)

## Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the PALS and complaints team on freephone 0800 328 7971.

# Notes

Please use this space to record any information you may find helpful.

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

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若您需要本信息的另一种语言或格式的文本，请与我们联系

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The Podiatry Service is part of our Older People Directorate.