

Cold Cuts

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Winter Weather Warning: Circulatory Problems Can Be Dangerous

By Christine M. Lynch, Member

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Purple has always been my favorite color. Having purple hands, however, is not a fashion statement I wish to achieve, but that is exactly what I have four months out of the year.

When I was in high school, I walked to school about a mile each day. I recall standing by my locker on winter mornings and seeing that my hands were part purple, part deep orange, and had white tips—lovely. Back then I made it into a joke so that the kids would laugh *with* me, rather than at me.

White, Blue, and Red

Years later that I learned this discoloration was due to a condition called Raynaud's Syndrome or Raynaud's Phenomenon. Often, the Raynaud's problem can begin after any exposure to cold or when strong emotions occur. Spasmodic contractions of the blood vessels restrict the blood flow causing fingers, toes, ears, and possibly the nose to turn white. Arteries in the fingers and toes may also collapse. Once the area is without sufficient blood flow, the skin turns shades of blue. Then, as the blood flow returns, the skin appears reddened and may swell and throb.

A surprising reaction to my hands occurred when a minor injury landed me in the ER. The attending physician was much more focused on my "classic" Raynaud's than on my sprained wrist. He actually gathered a

group of nurses around to show them my case.

He also had the audacity to tell me to stop smoking. Good grief—I never touched a cigarette in my life, but he assumed that was the cause of my problem. After living with the problem and doing some research, I came to see that he might have been partially right.

Both my parents smoked heavily and when you consider that we lived in an apartment and took long car trips together, I was inhaling a lot of second-hand smoke.



"The attending physician was much more focused on my 'classic' Raynaud's than on my sprained wrist. He actually gathered a group of nurses around to show them my case."

One of my male co-workers has been bothered by Raynaud's Syndrome for about 10 or 15 years. He told me, "I noticed when I used my snow blower, my fingers would sting. Then, when I came back inside, they would hurt and throb." He didn't see a doctor about it, but he did look up the symptoms.

"When I next saw my doctor, I mentioned Raynaud's to him. He told me

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Common Sense Tips



By Christine M. Lynch, Member

Christine offers some common sense tips for us frosties:

- **On cold days always wear a hat and gloves** (preferably mittens), also a scarf, plus good socks and shoes. Several layers of loose clothing are the best protection.
- **Keep moving fingers and toes** to increase circulation.
- **Use disposable warmers** if you will be out for an extended period.
- **Avoid getting your hands and feet wet** when you are outside in the cold.
- **Never hold onto anything cold for an extended time.**
- **Wear gloves when shopping for freezer items** in a store.
- **At home when reaching into the freezer, use a glove or towel** around the object.
- **Also, use an insulated cup** for cold drinks.
- **Eat foods that tend to help warm your body**, including ginger, cinnamon, peppers.
- **Limit tea and coffee**, and greatly limit or eliminate alcohol (the jury still is out on red wine, but it might be justified due to its alleged benefits). (ed note: limit caffeine)
- **Do not use any tobacco products.**
- **Exercise!** If it is too cold outside, do an inside workout to get your heart pumping.
- **Control stress** as best as possible (exercise often helps this, as well).

Member Tips



More success stories and tips members would like us to share with fellow frosties:

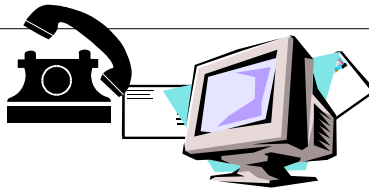
- **Plastic Bags to the Rescue** - Karen from Massachusetts discovered a great trick to keep feet warm during outdoor winter activities: Wrap bare feet in plastic bags; wear them under socks and shoes or boots. She says the plastic acts as a vapor barrier—keeping socks dry and feet warm. Another benefit—no blisters! She suggests the bags used to deliver newspapers to help with recycling.

Editor's Note: I tried plastic bags on my feet AND my hands as an extra layer when cross-country skiing in February. It really helped. My thumbs usually go numb and don't come back. This time, they went partially, came back and felt OK for the full outing. Thanks Karen!

- **Acupuncture for Ulcers** - Karl in Florida told us, after numerous attempts to heal his badly ulcerated fingers, he gave up on medical science and tried acupuncture. Upon seeing his hands for the first visit, the acupuncturist said "This is the worst case of Raynaud's I have ever seen. I cannot cure it, but I may be able to help the ulcers." following five months of treatments once or twice a week, the ulcers were gone, and after several months they remain gone. Karl says he still has Raynaud's, but can prevent the ulcers from coming back with normal precautions. Anyone wishing to correspond with Karl to inquire more about acupuncture, he can be reached at: Karland-JanACIM@aol.com.

DISCLAIMER: The Raynaud's Association does not endorse the drugs, treatments or products reported in this newsletter. Each patient's needs and experiences may vary. Member tips and product reviews are not clinically-based reports. So please review all treatment options with your doctor and use caution in exploring new products.

Member Connections



- * Bob in central NY would like to correspond with fellow frosties in the Finger Lakes region. Please contact him at Bob-byKNY@LocalNet.com.
- * Julia would like to connect with other members who also suffer from CREST. You can reach Julia at kregenow@astron.berkeley.edu.
- * Dixie has offered to speak with any members who are "down" and need cheering up. If you want a cheerful ear, call her at 913-294-5826. (Editor's note: She does make your day!)

Anyone wishing to connect with other Raynaud's members, ask questions or share success stories, send your requests to: Cold Cuts, Raynaud's Association, Inc., 94 Mercer Avenue, Hartsdale, NY 10530, or e-mail lynn@raynauds.org.

Special Thanks to Our Newsletter Sponsor:



In our last issue of Cold Cuts, we announced we'd be unable to continue sending our newsletters via postal mail, as the expense was getting too high for our budget.

But you see, we're back! That's thanks to our new sponsor Hoodman Corporation. Their ThermalRest® division makes heated wrist pads that should be a godsend to Raynaud's sufferers tied to their desks in cold winter months! Your wrists sit on the heated pad placed in front of your computer keyboard. It's easy to hook up, has an adjustable heat control letting you dial in the exact amount of soothing warmth you need, and is soft and comfy to use.

You can learn more about ThermalRest® in the enclosed literature, or go to the Special Offers section of our website: www.raynauds.org/offers/ThermalRest.cfm.

We're also grateful to our continuing corporate donor **WarmMe-Ups.com Inc.** and happy to announce our newest corporate donor **Heatbands™ Ltd.**

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Hot Products for Cold Sufferers



Here are more products that may help make life easier and more comfortable for fellow frosties.

⚙ **Heatbands™** - I first learned of this product from a member who found them on the web. These are thin, flat strips of insulated coated fabric that wrap around your wrist. It doesn't sound like they'd help much, but covering your wrists does help keep your fingers warm, just as covering your neck helps keep your whole body warmer. The bands are light, easy to take with you, hide well under clothes and leave the hands free for working/typing. They come in several colors to either blend in with your apparel, or select basic flesh tone—one size fits all. As the adhesive to wrap around the wrist is not able to be re-attached, they are only good for a single use, but not that expensive. The manufacturer is in the U.K., but accepts U.S. credit cards. A month's supply of 60 bands (one for each hand) costs \$22.97. You can order them through the special offers section of our web site, or go to www.heatbands.com. (No U.S. toll-free number, sorry.) Please tell them you found the product from the Raynaud's Association.

⚙ **Heatable Body Shawl** - Suzanne Lovell found this product for us. It's a body shawl you can microwave and cuddle up in for deliciously warm comfort. You'll also find lots of other microwaveable products to order

on this site called Grampas Garden. The shawl comes in two pattern combinations. One appears more oriented towards kids—as they say kids love them, the other is solid navy microfleece. Order from www.grampasgarden.com for \$40.00, or call 877-373-4328.

⚙ **Thermal Foot Cover**- These open-back booties are designed specifically for diabetics, arthritis patients, and Raynaud's sufferers. They claim to be clinically proven to increase the skin temperature by 2 to 3 degrees for optimal heat therapy. Even though the back is open, they are safe for use without shoes, with a non-skid rubber sole to keep from slipping. Order by shoe size (mens/womens). Available from the Feel Good Store Catalog. Order item #FC8008 for \$39.99. Call 800-926-0880, or visit www.FeelGoodStore.com. Use key code #10P320E.

⚙ **Fun Beverage Insulators** - These are updated versions of insulated containers for canned beverages (I also use them to hold yogurt). Most people buy them to keep their drinks cold, but we frosties love them because they let us hold cold food and drinks without the pain. These come in either camouflage fabric (#5094) or cowhide (#5096). Each can be personalized to let the family know to keep their paws off your holder! They are a bit pricey compared to the rubbery logo promo versions

manufacturers give away, but that's the price of looking fashionable. Camouflage versions sell for \$34.95, the cowhide ones are \$64.95. Sold in the Crows Nest Trading Co. catalog: www.crowsnesttrading.com, or call 800-325-9897. Use key code A06390.

⚙ **Comfortable Mask** - The headline in the Walter Drake catalog for this product really grabbed me: "You lose over 40% of body temperature breathing in cold." Their solution is a soft brushed fleecy mask that fits over the mouth and nose. It works by filtering in and warming the air you inhale. Has polyester lining and stretchy ear straps. Order #101-02325 for \$19.99 at www.wdrake.com, or call 800-525-9291. Use Source Code #110641175.

⚙ **Rock & Roll Ear Warmers** - What a fabulous concept: Combining warm fleecy ear warmers with JVC® high-quality ear phones! They are made of lightweight insulating Polartec®, wrap around the back of the head with an adjustable frame for a no-slip fit, and have a Dry-Release® feature to wick away sweat (not much of a problem for us frosties...). Works with most MP3, CD, radio and cassette players. Order #75759 from the Sahalie catalog for \$29.50. Call 800-458-4438, or go to www.sahalie.com. Use Catalog Code # 32104-10334.





Winter Weather Warning

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there was nothing he knew to do for it, and so I would just have to live with it.”

Happily, in recent years, physicians have become more aware of the problem and can make effective recommendations in most cases.

Circulatory Problems

Raynaud's Syndrome is only one type of circulatory problem, although it does affect roughly 5 percent of the U.S. population (higher among women). Others suffering poor circulation may have heart problems, diabetes or other maladies, plus they may not exercise sufficiently. Often a non-healing wound may signal circulatory troubles, so it is important to get these checked by a doctor.

People with circulatory problems need to be cautious about getting chilled all through the year, but *every* body must be careful when living with wintry weather. Naturally, the body wants to minimize heat loss and maintain its core temperature. To do this, it redirects blood near the surfaces to veins deeper within the body. This means that the extremities, particularly the hands and feet, lose out when there isn't a fair supply of blood to circulate properly.

Most of the time this is an inconvenience, however, when the tem-

perature plunges and there is a wind chill, people with circulatory problems must take extra precautions. Otherwise, stiff swollen fingers and toes will not only turn odd colors, they could develop hypothermia and frostbite. What was merely annoying could turn dangerous and even lead to loss of digits.

Treating the problem

Once you become aware that you are having problems with circulation, call your physician, who may recommend something as simple as a daily dose of a children's aspirin to help thin the blood. Other drugs also can be prescribed, such as a calcium channel-blockers which aid in opening up the blood vessels. In addition, you might want to explore alternative treatments that can help to relieve the condition.

Wendy Slate is a professional who sees many cases of Raynaud's. She is an Occupational Therapist and Certified Hand Therapist who says “There are a surprising number of people affected by Raynaud's, although many of them may not realize the problem.”

It is when they come in to her office with some other problem or injury that she notices their Raynaud's. “We most definitely can help relieve this condition,” Slate says by using an

assortment of treatments including paraffin hot packs, ultrasound and laser techniques, and a massage that employs the topical lotion Topricin, known to improve circulation and reduce inflammation.

Ms. Slate also stresses the benefits of using imagery. “With some simple training, people can learn to raise their fingertip temperature. I have seen this work.”

Another treatment to consider is acupuncture. According to the ancients, health is maintained when the fine acupuncture needles are strategically placed on points along meridians. This action unblocks the paths for the vital energy and keeps it moving efficiently throughout the body. Several years ago, I read an article about acupuncture and decided to see whether it would help my hands. Soon after my first session, I saw remarkable improvement in my hands as well as my overall health. For those people who shy away from needles, there are other practices that also are based on Chinese medicine, such as acupressure that may be worth investigating

The important things to remember are that all circulatory problems should be taken seriously, and that numerous approaches can help.



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Editor's Note: This issue reports personal experiences that, while valuable, do not prove the specific intervention (imaging; acupuncture) worked. Digital ulcers will generally improve over a 6-8 week period, and in most controlled clinical studies there is a 20-40% improvement in the placebo (non-treatment) study group. Thus interventions can appear effective (especially if the process calms the patient and the weather is warming while treatment is underway), but must be compared under similar conditions to no intervention. Please be careful in interpreting the benefit of non-clinically proven therapies. Warm temperatures are the key to relief.