

❄️ Cold Cuts ❄️

Volume 8 Issue 1

Published by The Raynaud's Association, Inc.

Spring 2001

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Digital Ulcers: Treatment Options

By Lynn Wunderman
Editor

We've had a number of questions regarding the care of digital ulcers and success found with sympathectomy treatments.

While I don't profess to be a medical expert on the subject, I am happy to pass along what I've learned from personal experience and a few related resources found on the subject.

First, what is a digital ulcer? No, it's not a hole burned in your finger by stress and digestive acid. What digital ulcers do have in common with the stomach variety is that they both involve breaks in the skin tissue. In the case of digital ulcers, the tissue is broken by a lack of blood - specifically the oxygen in the blood - needed for maintenance of healthy skin. People with Raynaud's are more susceptible to digital ulcers than the average person due to their lack of good circulation. Generally speaking, it is the more severe Raynaud's cases that will result in ulcers. More severe sufferers tend to have Secondary Raynaud's - the type that is a by-product of another connective tissue disease, such as Scleroderma, Rheumatoid Arthritis or Lupus. But not always...so be aware.

What's the danger? The danger is that ulcers that take too long to heal can result in permanent damage to your blood vessels or tissues, and - at its most extreme - can lead to gangrene. Now don't be alarmed that people with Raynaud's will need to have their fingers amputated. Again, it's the rare case. But be aware and recognize the signs and get treatment right away to



ensure your ulcers heal quickly and safely. If you're not sure how to tell if you have ulcers, they appear as red or dark dots on the tips of your fingers, toes or other extremity and are extremely sensitive to the touch. If you suspect you could be experiencing something similar, please contact your doctor or seek treatment right away. If your doctor is not available, try contacting a wound care center.

“For extreme cases when alternative treatments are unsuccessful, digital artery sympathectomy procedures have been used as a last resort to prevent amputation. .”

The “Scleroderma from A to Z” website (www.sclero.org) lists the following treatment options:

- Flexible Hydroactive Dressings -

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 Raynaud's Association

Our Website is Up:
www.raynauds.org

Announcing the launch of our website: www.raynauds.org. It went live in March and is already generating several inquiries each week. We're hearing from newly diagnosed sufferers seeking advice and information, people looking for confirmation if they have Raynaud's, relatives and friends of sufferers, as well as students doing research projects on the subject.

The current version of the site includes:

- [Home page](#) - with an overview of the condition and the group
- [About Raynaud's](#) - with the history of its discovery, typical symptoms, treatments, and statistics
- [About Us](#) - our goals and history of the group
- [Newsletters](#) - all newsletters are available to view (in their original format) and print from the site
- [Contact Us](#) - a form to fill out to receive more information or to join
- [Search](#) - a search capability to find any subject within the site, including subjects referenced in the newsletter publications

Future enhancements to the site will include: a member sign-up and payment capability, links to related sites (including the ability to search for a rheumatologist in your area), and a members' only message board.

Please take time to check out the site and let us know your feedback and suggestions through the Contact page.

Helpful Strategies and Research from Around the Globe

From U.S. Frosties



I've received letters and notes from several members suggesting products and strategies that have worked for them, in hopes they may work for you, too.

- Sidney Kalugin, NY - Has gotten relief through a new product called "**Vitamin O**" - liquid drops of oxygen. Sydney claims to now have very good circulation in his fingers and toes which he credits to use of the product.
- Charlotte Hewson, ME - Recommends those **soft, fuzzy steering wheel covers** sold at auto supply stores. They may not be very pretty, but it keeps her hands warm. Charlotte found driving used to be one of her worst experiences. The cover has been a great help, as steering wheels drain heat from hands very quickly.

From Across the Atlantic



An article published in *The Express* tells of trials in Britain of a new product called **Seredrin**. It's based on an extract from the **ginkgo biloba tree**, the leaves of which have been credited with boosting circulation.

The article references Seredrin as both a drug and a supplement. (Maybe the classifications in Britain are different than those here in the U.S.?) The extra ingredient in the product is **phytosome**, which is said to help intensify the activity of the ginkgo.

Clinical trials of the product have been backed by the Raynaud's & Scleroderma Association in the U.K. Results were to have been announced this past February. We're waiting to hear back from the U.K. Raynaud's group for the outcome of the recent study. Previous non-clinical trials reported 70% of Raynaud's sufferers found relief after taking Seredrin.

From Warm- Blooded Milanos

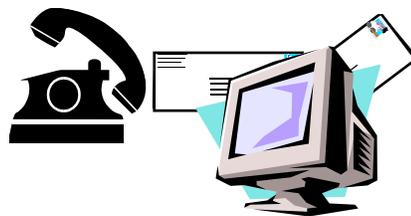


The Scleroderma Foundation's Winter newsletter included an article about PGE₁ *a*-cyclodextrin, a prostaglandin analog. Prostaglandins are known to help decrease vasospasms - the narrowing of blood vessels occurring with the onset of a Raynaud's attack.

The study, conducted in Milan, Italy, researched the effectiveness in treating Raynaud's phenomenon among 24 patients with Scleroderma. Results showed the drug had no effect on the *severity* of individual attacks; however, 87% of patients said "they felt better", and 80% said they had fewer, shorter attacks. In addition, 12 of 14 patients suffering from finger ulcerations reported healing.

Alas, nothing is without cost: Side effects included "headaches, increased intestinal motility and reactions at the site of injection." The overall conclusion was that the drug did significantly reduce symptoms of Raynaud's in the Scleroderma patients studied.

Member Connections



Members have asked for experiences from other members and for more information on the following topics:

- Underactive thyroid conditions and its affect on Raynauds?
- Sharing of experiences through chat rooms on the web.
- Best warm cities (watch out for the air conditioning!).
- Sufferers with SLE and lumphocytic colitis - what helps?
- Ways Raynaud's affects your job / your life?
- Others with mitral valve prolapse (as published in our last issue)?

Please contact us with any input you'd like to offer in any of the above areas. Anyone wishing to connect with other Raynaud's members, ask questions or share success stories, we're glad to publish them in our next issue. Send your requests to: Cold Cuts, Raynaud's Association, Inc., 94 Mercer Avenue, Hartsdale, NY 10530, or e-mail lynn@raynauds.org.

Q & A

Question: What's the best way to get circulation back in our fingers when returning inside on a cold Winter's day?

Answer: Edwin Sperling of NY says he soaks his hands in warm water. While it works, he wonders if other techniques would be more effective. I personally find the warm water technique to be quite effective during a painful attack. I also enjoy holding onto a heated charcoal pack - the kind you buy at ski shops. Eating warm foods, like soup, or drinking a nice cup of hot tea also helps me get through the winter. Any other strategies that work for you, send them to lynn@raynauds.org.

Hot Products for Cold Sufferers



Don't wait until next season to buy some of these toasty products. While I haven't sampled them all yet, they sound like real winners!

 **Heated Travel Blanket** — This polar fleece blanket is powered by a standard 12-volt auto cigarette outlet. No more frozen road trips! The 8 ft. cord let's even the coldest back seat passenger stay warm and cozy. Order item # VE1040 for \$40.00 from Absolute Amenities at 888-926-3648, or visit the web site at www.absolutea.com.

 **Copper Gloves** — I was taken aback by the connection between copper and apparel, but the copper threads woven in with the blended elastic fibers shield hands from the cold and conduct natural body heat. They look like fashionable black driving gloves with a leather palm and finger bottoms. Come in Men's (# CWG1003) and Women's (# CWG1005) in sizes S, M, L, XL. Price is \$29.00 They're also from Absolute Amenities at 888-926-3648, or visit the web site at www.absolutea.com.

 **Sheepskin Boots** — I've written before about warm clogs made by UGG®, also the manufacturer of my favorite slippers. Judy Croughan writes that they also make sheepskin boots that are warmer than any others she's found. So warm, that the manufacturer suggest "wearing them without socks!" Well, fat chance for us frosties...Judy didn't provide any order information, but I found them on the Airwalk Shoes web site. Here's the link: www.airwalkshoes.com/ugg.html. They have lots of styles to choose from, including their yummy slippers. Boot styles start at \$110.00. One search in Google located over 30 retailers and web links, so enjoy. Thanks Judy!

 **La Canadienne Boots** — These cute little booties warm your toes

with an Italian shearling fleece collar and thick pile lining. Also have speed lacing features and "traction control" lug soles. Come in Black (# 7070), Brown (# 7071), Ice (# 7072) and Red (# 7073) for \$89.95. Come in Narrow, Medium, Wide and Double Wide. To order, call Maryland Square at 800-727-3895, or visit www.marylandsquare.com.

 **Instant Car Heater** — This portable ceramic heater (and fan) plugs into the cigarette lighter for instant heat. Imagine not having to wait for your car to heat up on its own! Its small, portable design lets you place it anywhere you need heat the most. Put it next to your feet and ankles for a toasty surge. Also doubles as a windshield defroster. Order the Auto Ceramic Heater & Fan for \$12.95 from J.D. Marvel Products at 888-414-5333.

 **Microwavable Slippers** — These are another variation on one of my favorite products. These cozy flannel booties have a microwavable pack above each arch. Heat the packs for about 2 minutes in your microwave and enjoy a toasty evening in front of the TV! Made of machine washable navy flannel. One size fits all. Price is \$18.95 - less expensive than others I've seen. Order # KO33 from Always Something Brilliant catalog at 800-454-9290, or visit www.alwaysbrilliant.com.

 **Mittzenvarmers** — These are microwavable mitts designed to improve circulation and soothe sore, tired hands. Contain an herbal pack inside that soothes the senses. Come in a pretty periwinkle fleece, one size fits most. Order # 12606 for \$39.00 from Femail Creations at 800-996-9223, or from their web site at www.femailcreations.com. Be sure to use key code #M11D300.

If you've had good or bad luck with products promising warmth and comfort, please share your findings with us for future issues. Write or e-mail me at lynn@raynauds.org.

Herbal Product Sales Wilting...



USA Today recently reported the results of a national survey conducted by the *Nutrition Business Journal* stating that sales of herbal supplements are starting to level off. Revenues last year grew only 1% compared to strong double-digit growth experienced over the past several years. The major reasons: Confusion and unrealized expectations.

- As products have proliferated, consumers are faced with a confusing array of choices.
- The lack of standardization among products and manufacturers further complicates the issue.
- Manufacturers have further shot themselves in the foot by over promising or oversimplifying the effectiveness consumers should expect. No product is a cure all for everyone.
- Negative publicity has also hurt sales of nutritional supplements, as studies refuting product claims are beginning to surface - granted the design of some studies has been the subject of some controversy.

Regardless of the sales trend, the message is clear: "Buyer Beware" and be careful! We urge you to check in with your doctor to ensure your herbal trials are compatible with any other medications you may be taking and to provide a watchful eye.

Digital Ulcers: Treatment Options

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such as Duoderm

- Oral Antibiotics
- Creams and Solutions - such as Betadine Solution®, Dakin's Solution®, Silvadene®, and hydrogen peroxide solution (1.5% - 3.0%)

Nitroglycerin creams are also known to be effective in helping to heal skin ulcers.

For extreme cases when alternative treatments (e.g., quit smoking, cold avoidance, calcium channel blockers, biofeedback) are unsuccessful, **digital artery sympathectomy procedures** have been used as a last resort to prevent amputation. I won't go into the medical description of this procedure, as the total number of syllables required would more than fill up this newsletter. What's most relevant is the concept: the procedure basically cuts off or strips your arteries leading into your hand in order to eliminate/reduce future "signals" in



your sympathetic nervous system to send the blood out from your fingers to protect your trunk and vital organs when stimulated by the cold or stress.

This procedure results in varying degrees of success. One study I read was able to heal ulcers in 6 out of 7 patients when monitored over a period of 2 years. The ulcers took from 4 weeks to 7 months to heal. Some patients had recurring ulcers in the 2-year period, but were healed with conservative treatment, such as wound care and antibiotics.

However, while the procedure can be effective in preventing amputation, patients' fingers do not regain a normal tolerance to cold and trauma. It truly is a last resort to prevent loss of a digit - not a cure-all for everyday aches and pains.

Anyone who's had successful treatments for ulcers, please share your experiences with us. Please write or e-mail me at lynn@raynauds.org.

Is There a Speaker in the House?

We've had a very hard time recruiting speakers this season. It's always been difficult to locate specialists qualified to speak on the subject of Raynaud's and related treatments. But this past season, I was most frustrated by a lack of interest by local professionals in committing to even a small, informal speaking engagement. What gives?

Thanks to fellow member Judy Croughan, we've been connected with Ingrid Bacci, an expert in the use of mind-body techniques to control your health. Ingrid has agreed to lead a session for us. As it's now so late in the season, we plan to hold the engagement for the fall when everyone is back from vacation and ready to gear up for the cold season. New York Metro members, watch your mailboxes for the announcement. We'll be sure to review the presentation in the newsletter so all of you can benefit. In the meantime, check out Ingrid's website at www.ingridbacci.com.



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