



Guard Your Fingers And Toes From The Threat Of Raynaud's

(NAPSA)—Hypothermia and frostbite are typical health hazards when it's cold. Less well-known is Raynaud's phenomenon, which strikes susceptible people in cold temperatures.

Some five to ten percent of Americans—particularly women—are affected by Raynaud's (pronounced "ray nodes"), in which spasms of the blood vessels cause reduced blood flow to the extremities. It can deprive the fingers and toes of blood—as well as the nose, lips and ear lobes. When they get cold, these parts can become numb and the skin can turn white or even blue. Raynaud's can lead to more serious health problems like skin ulcers and gangrene.

Once people with Raynaud's warm their fingers or toes, blood flow increases, causing the skin to turn red and feeling returns. Episodes can last from a minute to several hours.

Stress may also play a role in Raynaud's by releasing chemicals that can trigger symptoms typically seen in the disorder. With most people, however, doctors don't know the underlying cause of Raynaud's.

The frequency of Raynaud's attacks varies. "Some folks get them daily or several times a week," explains Gregory Dennis, M.D., a rheumatologist with NIH's National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS).

"It doesn't always take really cold temperatures or long periods of exposure to bring on an attack," Dr. Dennis notes. Attacks can occur whenever temperatures dip below 60 degrees. For some people, sticking their hands in the frozen section at a grocery store for just a few seconds could trigger an episode.

If you believe you have Raynaud's, see your doctor. There are medicines that can decrease both the frequency and the severity of attacks.

To help prevent Raynaud's



For people with Raynaud's phenomenon, extremities are highly susceptible to cold.

attacks:

- Always wear gloves, thick socks, a hat that covers your ears or earmuffs when you go outside during cold weather.

- Don't smoke. Smoking impairs your circulation. The nicotine in cigarettes can also cause your skin temperature to drop, which could bring on an attack.

- Recognize that air conditioning can trigger an episode.

- If you're sensitive to cold, use insulated drinking glasses and wear gloves before reaching into a freezer.

- Recognize and avoid stressful situations.

- Get regular exercise. It's good for circulation and may help prevent attacks.

If you feel an attack beginning, get inside, run your hands or toes under lukewarm water or soak them in a bowl of warm water. Or use a heating pad on a medium setting for 15 minutes. Don't put your hands or any part of your body on a radiator or other object that can burn you.

For a copy of NIAMS' publication, "Questions and Answers About Raynaud's Phenomenon," visit www.niams.nih.gov/hi/topics/raynaud/ar125fs.htm; write NIAMS Information Clearinghouse, National Institutes of Health, 1 AMS Circle, Bethesda, MD 20892-3675 or call 1-877-22-NIAMS.