Chilblains

Community Podiatry

Some people, during cold winter months, suffer the irritation of chilblains - those red, swollen patches on the feet or hands that itch and throb. Chilblains can in fact be quite nasty, with cracked, weeping skin and can then get infected.

Who gets them and why?
Some people seem to be more prone than others (children for example), and the disorder is usually linked with poor blood circulation when exposed to cold.

When fingers or toes become very cold, the little blood vessels in the skin constrict in the body's attempt to conserve heat. This is a normal reaction but sometimes the area becomes very pale or blue and perhaps numb. Subsequent exposure to heat causes the blood vessels to over-expand and fluid flows out of them. This causes swelling and irritation, leaving a painful red itchy area.

“Putting you first is at the heart of everything we do.”

Early warning signs:
- Redness, swelling
- Itching and pain
- Cracked, weeping skin
- Possible infection

What to do:
1. DON’T scratch them. Soothing lotions such as calamine may ease the discomfort.
2. Use a chilblain cream.
3. If the skin has broken, apply a sterile dressing and change every second day until healed.

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How to prevent them

1. Keep your hands and feet warm, dry and well covered during cold weather. Thick warm socks and gloves are essential when going out, but make sure they are not tight, as that will restrict the circulation. Thick-soled shoes and/or thermal insoles will help to insulate your feet from the cold ground.

2. If your feet or hands do get very cold, DO NOT apply sudden heat to them, for example by putting them onto a radiator. Wriggle your fingers and toes to encourage the circulation.

3. You may find it helpful to use a chilblain cream throughout the cold weather if they occur each year.

4. Stop smoking. This can make symptoms worse, as the chemicals in tobacco can cause the small blood vessels to narrow. Quitting may ease or even cure the problem.

If you want to find out more about stopping for good, call Phoenix, The Lincolnshire service for smokers who want to stop

01522 550681

Or the NHS Smoking Helpline on

0800 169 0 169

www.givingupsmoking.co.uk

5. Cut down on caffeine. Tea, coffee and cola can also worsen symptoms in some people. Try cutting out caffeine for a few weeks to see if it helps.