

Your Next Step, P.C.

FOOT NOTES

March 2010

SPECIAL EVENTS!

- ◆ Cold Feet
- ◆ Avoiding Frostbite

Cold Feet (and hands) is a fairly common complaint amongst patients. This “Footnote” will be limited to people who suffer from cold hands and feet as there is usually a common denominator causing the problem in all extremities.

This section is devoted to the symptoms of cold feet that are not due to a blood vessel blockage. **If you are suffering from feet that are cold and appear discolored, may be painful when at rest or when trying to walk a short distance or perhaps burn or tingle, this may be a sign of poor circulation and immediate medical attention is required.**

In most instances cold extremities can be weather related. Cold temperatures have a constricting affect on blood vessels, which will decrease the flow of blood to the hands and feet. However, there are other factors that will cause these symptoms. In addition to cold weather, a poor functioning thyroid, anemia, Raynauds disease, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and high blood pressure can also lead to cold feet and hands.

People who have chronically cold hand and cold feet should have a complete work-up to rule out the above mentioned conditions. Assuming your tests come back normal here is a list of things you can try to improve the situation.

- **Wear warm clothing.** Seems like an obvious statement but one of the problems many people do not realize is that cold weather constricts your peripheral circulation thereby increasing blood flow (and heat) to your torso. By wearing very warm coats and protecting your “body heat” this counteracts the peripheral constricting process. Additionally, wearing warm covering on your legs and feet reduces the exposure to cold on your extremities further negating the effects of cold weather on your system. If you do a lot of walking outdoors in order to get to work carry your work or dress shoes in a bag and wear warm socks and boots to and from work.

- **Do not smoke.** Our podiatrists know this is easier said than done, but smoking causes vasoconstriction on your circulation. Just like exposure to cold, tobacco clamps down your arteries decreasing blood flow to the feet. Worse than exposure to cold, tobacco use over the long haul also increases arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) in your feet and legs, as well as elsewhere.

- **Eat warm food.** It is not so much that warm food “warms” you up; it is more that warm food requires less body energy than cold food in order to be digested. This leaves more body energy to help keep you warm.

- **Avoid coffee; drink tea.** Caffeinated coffee constricts blood vessels as does all caffeinated drinks, but green and black tea contain flavonoids which help support blood vessel health.

- **Nutritional supplements.** Magnesium 1000mg per day relaxes blood vessels and helps promote blood flow. Too much magnesium may cause diarrhea. Hawthorn berry and resveratrol supplements maintain the integrity of your blood vessels.

- **Aerobic exercise.** Regular exercise such as walking, preferably indoors in cold weather, is a great way to promote better circulation to your feet.



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AVOIDING FROSTBITE

Most people think of frostbite as a condition that occurs when you are abandoned in the Canadian Rockies for a few days. Believe it or not you can develop superficial frostbite doing nothing more than walking four blocks to work everyday wearing nylons and shoes in the middle of winter.

Depending on the quality of circulation to the feet to begin with, exposure to cold damp weather will further constrict the blood vessels that go primarily into the toes. This diminishes the blood flow to the skin which starves the skin of oxygen and nutrients. The patient will complain of pain in some or all of the toes. There may also be itching. There is usually a blue to red discoloration in the toes. In the slightly more severe case the toes may begin to ulcerate and thereby run the risk of becoming infected.

Treatment obviously is to avoid exposure to cold and to habits that potentiate vasoconstriction of the vessels.