

Chilblains



What are chilblains?

Chilblains are tiny, itchy, painful, red bumps or swellings on the skin. They commonly occur on the fingers and toes, but can appear on other extremities of the body including the face, legs, or ears.

You might experience a single chilblain, but frequently, multiple chilblains can develop. They may merge to create a larger, swollen, red patch of skin. The skin may crack, leading to potential infection. This is particularly worrisome for high-risk individuals like those with diabetes or individuals with poor circulation and who have slow healing abilities.

What causes chilblains?

Chilblains occur due to the body's response to exposure to cold followed by rewarming. When the skin is exposed to cold, the small blood vessels near the surface contract. Upon rewarming, these vessels may dilate faster than the surrounding larger vessels can accommodate, resulting in blood leakage and inflammation.

Treatment for chilblains

While chilblains are uncomfortable, they typically do not result in permanent damage and tend to heal on their own within a few days/weeks, provided you avoid further exposure to cold. Prevention is key when it comes to chilblains.

Tips to avoid chilblains



Wear gloves, hats, scarves and suitable socks and footwear to ensure all extremities are well insulated and protected from the cold



Do not scratch or rub chilblains. Apply witch hazel or calamine to soothe discomfort



Keep dry to avoid heat loss



If your skin breaks or cracks, apply a dry dressing like a regular adhesive plaster to shield the area. Using antiseptic ointments such as 'Sudocrem' can provide relief to damaged skin and aid in preventing infections.



Allow the body to warm slowly, do not stand next to a heat source such as a fire or radiator to heat quickly. Do not directly overheat chilblains such as using hot water.