

Raynaud's Syndrome

The SSF thanks Ashley Beall, MD for authoring this Patient Education Sheet. Dr. Beall is a Partner with Arthritis and Rheumatism Associates, Wheaton, Maryland.

Raynaud's Syndrome (sometimes called Raynaud's phenomenon) is defined as repeated episodes of color changes in the fingers and/or toes with exposure to cold temperatures or during episodes of emotional stress. The color changes are due to a spasm of the blood vessels that feed the fingers and toes. The digits typically turn very white, then can take on a bluish color with prolonged exposure to the cold, and finally can turn very red as blood flow resumes. Raynaud's Syndrome occurs in approximately 15-30% of patients with Sjögren's syndrome.

Some things that you can do to control your Raynaud's Syndrome include:

- When you know that you will be exposed to cold temperatures, wear layered clothing. This will keep your core body temperature warm and keep the vessels feeding the fingers and toes from spasm.
- Always carry a jacket with you on outings, as you may find yourself in an unexpectedly cool area.
- Wear a hat and cover your face and ears with a scarf in cold temperatures.
- Always wear hand coverings in cold temperatures. Mittens are best, as they will use the body heat generated by your fingers. However, a good pair of insulated gloves is also helpful.
- Wear heavy socks or layers of socks to keep feet warm at all times.
- Keep your home and office space comfortably warm (greater than 70 degrees is best).
- Avoid reaching into the freezer both at home and in the grocery store.
- Use insulated containers when handling cold drinks or food.
- Rinse food with warm water instead of cold water.
- Wear protective gloves when washing dishes.
- Use disposable heat packs as needed for your hands and feet. These are available at many sporting goods stores.
- Always let the water warm up before getting into the shower, and keep the bathroom door closed while bathing or showering to hold in heat.
- When possible, have a loved one warm up your car before getting into it on a cold day.
- Moisturize your hands and feet every day to prevent your skin from cracking.
- When your hands or feet start to feel cold, wiggle your fingers and toes, move your arms and legs around to get blood flowing, or put your hands under your armpits to warm them up.
- If you have access to water when a flare starts, run warm water over your fingers and toes until skin color returns to normal.
- Do not smoke — this constricts the blood vessels that feed the hands and feet.
- Talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Several medications can be used to help the vessels stay dilated, including a class of blood pressure medications called calcium channel blockers. Some medicines, such as beta blockers used for high blood pressure, may make Raynaud's worse.