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By Chris Tighe at 1:29 pm, Mar 08, 2016

What Is Raynaud's?

Raynaud's is a rare disorder that affects the arteries. Arteries are blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to different parts of your body.

Raynaud's sometimes is called a disease, syndrome, or phenomenon. The disorder is marked by brief episodes of vasospasm (VA-so-spazm), which is a narrowing of the blood vessels.

Vasospasm of the arteries reduces blood flow to the fingers and toes. In people who have Raynaud's, the disorder usually affects the fingers. In about 40 percent of people who have Raynaud's, it affects the toes. Rarely, the disorder affects the nose, ears, nipples, and lips.

Overview

There are two main types of Raynaud's—primary and secondary.

In primary Raynaud's (also called Raynaud's disease), the cause isn't known. Primary Raynaud's is more common and tends to be less severe than secondary Raynaud's.

Secondary Raynaud's is caused by an underlying disease, condition, or other factor. This type of Raynaud's is often called Raynaud's phenomenon.

If you have primary or secondary Raynaud's, cold temperatures or stress can trigger "Raynaud's attacks." During an attack, little or no blood flows to affected body parts.

As a result, the skin may turn white and then blue for a short time. As blood flow returns, the affected areas may turn red and throb, tingle, burn, or feel numb.

In both types of Raynaud's, even mild or brief changes in temperature can cause Raynaud's attacks. For example, taking something out of the freezer or being exposed to temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit can cause your fingers to turn blue.

Raynaud's

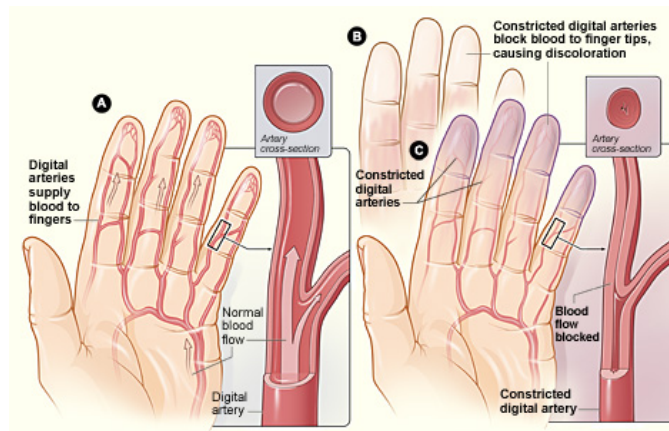


Figure A shows arteries in the fingers (digital arteries) with normal blood flow. The inset image shows a cross-section of a digital artery. Figure B shows fingertips that have turned white due to blocked blood flow. Figure C shows narrowed digital arteries, causing blocked blood flow and blue fingertips. The inset image shows a cross-section of a narrowed digital artery.

Most people who have Raynaud's have no long-term tissue damage or disability. However, people who have severe Raynaud's can develop skin sores or gangrene from prolonged or repeated Raynaud's attacks. "Gangrene" refers to the death or decay of body tissues.

Outlook

About 5 percent of the U.S. population has Raynaud's. For most people who have primary Raynaud's, the disorder is more of a bother than a serious illness. They usually can manage the condition with minor lifestyle changes.

Secondary Raynaud's may be harder to manage. However, several treatments are available to help prevent or relieve symptoms. With secondary Raynaud's, it's important to treat the underlying disease or condition that's causing it.

Researchers continue to look for better ways to diagnose and treat Raynaud's.

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Updated: March 21, 2014