

Chilblains

Advice for effective care



Many people feel the cold in winter, but not everyone will develop chilblains. Whether they do or not depends to a large extent on the efficiency of your circulation. Chilblains are small itchy, red swellings on the skin, which can become increasingly painful, can swell and then dry out, leaving cracks in the skin, which expose you to the risk of infection. They can occur on the toes, particularly the smaller ones, fingers, the face, especially the nose, and the lobes of the ears. They can also occur on areas of the feet exposed to pressure, for instance, on a bunion, the tips of toes, or where tight shoes squeeze the second toe.

Cold feet

Chilblains are caused by the skin's abnormal reaction to cold. Damp or draughty conditions, dietary factors and hormonal imbalance can be contributory factors. If the skin is chilled and is then followed by too rapid warming next to a fire or hot water bottle, chilblains may result.

Who is most at risk?

This condition mainly affects young adults working outdoors in cold places or people who do not wear socks or tights in winter. Elderly people, whose circulation is less efficient than it used to be, people who don't take enough exercise, and those suffering from anaemia are also susceptible. People who smoke are more at risk of chilblains as nicotine constricts blood vessels.

What are the symptoms?

With the onset of the cold weather, susceptible people will experience burning and itching on their hands and feet. On going into a warm room, the itching and burning is intensified. There may be some swelling or redness, and in extreme cases, the surface of the skin may break, and sores (ulcers) may develop.

What can you do?

To help prevent chilblains, keep your body, feet and legs warm, especially if your circulation is poor and your mobility is limited. The whole body, rather than just the feet, needs to be kept warm. Several layers of clothing will help to keep you warm: trousers, long johns, high boots, tights and leg warmers or long socks with fleecy inner soles and thick, cushioned outer soles will help. Avoid going out early if possible, when the weather is generally colder, and wrap up well with a scarf, hat, gloves and coat. Avoid 'nipping out' with just your indoor clothes on, even if it is only for a couple of minutes. Natural fibre materials are advisable, as these help to hold warmth in against the skin, unlike man-made materials which tend to draw the heat away. Try to be active as this helps encourage circulatory flow.

You can also help prevent chilblains if you follow a regular foot health routine (see 'Looking after your feet' leaflet) and eat a healthy balanced diet.

If chilblains have developed

Don't scratch them; soothing lotions such as witch hazel or calamine will take away most of the discomfort. If the chilblain has ulcerated, apply an antiseptic dressing. If you are concerned about the appearance of the chilblain or have diabetes or are undergoing medical treatment, have the ulcer assessed by your GP or podiatrist.

If the chilblain hasn't broken you can paint it with a mixture of friar's balsam and a weak solution of iodine, which your pharmacist may make up for you, or an over-the-counter preparation. At night, rub some lanolin ointment or other good moisturisers well into the feet to help retain heat and moisture.

do not

- Use sharp instruments such as razor blades to cut corns or hard skin
- Use corn paints/corn plasters which contain acid
- Use ingrowing toenail paints as these contain acid.

When to seek medical advice

Most people don't need to seek medical advice if they have chilblains as they usually heal within a few weeks and don't cause any permanent problems. However, see your GP or podiatrist for advice if you have:

- Severe or recurring chilblains
- Signs of infection

Your GP may recommend taking a daily tablet called nifedipine which helps to relax blood vessels, improving circulation to the skin.

Podiatry services
Cantley Health Centre
Middleham Road
Goodison Boulevard
Cantley
Doncaster
DN4 6ED
Tel 01302 379550

If you would like this in large print, braille or on audiotape or would like this document in an alternative language, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0800 015 4334.

Amharic

ድህረ ገጽ ላይ በግልጽ እንዲታይ በትልቁ ብላጫ ተጽፎ ወይም በቲፕ ተተያይዞ ወይም በሌላ ቋንቋ ተጽፎ ለግዛቱ የሚፈልጉ ከዚህ የበለጸጉትን ምክርና ግንኙነት እንልግላችን በዚህ ቁጥር 0800 015 4334 ይውሰዱ ያንግኙ።

Arabic

إذا أردت الحصول على هذه الوثيقة بالخط الكبير أو بلغة برايل أو على هيئة شريط صوتي أو مترجمة إلى لغة بديلة فيرجى الاتصال بخدمة التنسيق ونصيحة المريض Patient Advice and Liaison Service على رقم الهاتف 0800 015 4334 .

Bengali

আপনি যদি এটা বড় অক্ষরের ছাপায়, ব্রেইল-এ, বা কানে শোনার টেইপ-এ পেতে চান অথবা আপনি যদি এই কাগজটা অন্য কোন ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে 0800 015 4334 নম্বরে পেশেন্ট এ্যাডভাইস এন্ড লিয়েজঁ সার্ভিসের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Cantonese (traditional Chinese)

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Czech

Pokud byste chtěli dokument psaný většími písmeny, brailovým písmem nebo na zvukové kazetě nebo v jiném jazyku, prosím, kontaktujte poradenskou službu pacientům na tel. 0800 015 4334.

Farsi

در صورت تمایل به داشتن این سند به نسخه ای با چاپ درشت تر، به خط بریل یا نسخه صوتی، و یا به زبانی دیگر، لطفاً با دفتر خدمات مشاوره و هماهنگی بیماران به شماره تلفن ۰۸۰۰۱۵۴۳۳۴ تماس حاصل نمایند.

French

Si vous désirez ce document en gros caractères, en braille, enregistré sur cassette audio ou dans une autre langue, veuillez contacter le service de conseils et liaison des patients [Patients Advice and Liaison Service] au 0800 015 4334.

Kurdish Sorani

ئێگەر ئێم زانیاریانە بە چاڵی گەورە، برائیل یان لەسەر شریتی دەنگی دەمخواییت یاخود نەم بەلێغانامە بە زماڤێکی دیكە دەمخواییت، تێکایە پێموهندی بکە بە خزمەتگوزاری زینمایی و هاوناهاهنگی نەمخوشاوه بە ژماره 0800 015 4334.

Polish

Jeżeli dokument wymagany jest w wersji drukowanej dużą czcionką lub alfabetem Braille'a, na kasecie audio lub w innym języku, prosimy o kontakt z zespołem ds. kontaktów z pacjentami (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) pod numerem telefonu 0800 015 4334.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਜਾਂ ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ ਰਚੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਜਾਂ ਇਸ ਸਮਝਾਵੇਂ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਰਚੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਮਰੀਜ਼ ਸਲਾਹ ਅਤੇ ਤਾਲ-ਮੇਲ ਸੇਵਾ (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) ਨਾਲ 0800 015 4334 ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Somali

Haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad kaan ku hesho far waaweyn, farta braille ee dadka indhaha la' ama cajalad dhegeysi ah ama haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad dukumeentigan ku hesho luqad kale, fadlan Adeegga Talobixinta iyo Xiriirinta ee Bukaaleyda (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) kala soo xiriir lambarka 0800 015 4334.

Turkish

Bu belgeyi büyük yazı, braille (kör alfabesi) veya ses kaydı olarak veya başka bir dilde almak istiyorsanız, lütfen 0800 015 4334 no.lu telefondan Hasta Danışmanlık ve İrtibat Hizmetleri ile bağlantıya geçiniz.

Urdu

اگر آپ یہ بڑی چھپائی، بریل میں یا صوتی ٹیپ پر حاصل کرنا چاہیں یا یہ دستاویز کسی قبیل زبان میں چاہیں تو براۓ کرم پیفٹ اینڈ ایڈوائس سروس سے 0800 015 4334 پر رابطہ کریں۔

Vietnamese

Nếu muốn có tài liệu này dưới dạng in chữ cỡ lớn hơn, chữ nổi braille hay băng ghi âm, hoặc bằng một ngôn ngữ khác, xin quý vị liên hệ bộ phận Dịch vụ Tư vấn và Liên lạc với Bệnh nhân theo số 0800 015 4334.

This information is correct at the time of publishing
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