

Raynaud's disease

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This idiopathic condition usually occurs in young women and affects the hands more than the feet. There is abnormal sensitivity in the arteriolar response to cold. These vessels constrict and the digits (usually the fingers) turn white and become incapable of fine movements. The capillaries then dilate and digits becoming swollen and dusky. As the attack passes off, the arterioles relax, oxygenated blood returns into the dilated capillaries and the digits become red. Thus, the condition is recognised by the characteristic sequence of blanching, dusky cyanosis and red engorgement, often accompanied by pain. Superficial necrosis is very uncommon. This condition must be distinguished from Raynaud's syndrome, which has similar features (see Raynaud's syndrome). Treatment of Raynaud's disease consists of protection from cold and avoidance of pulp and nail bed infection. Calcium antagonists, such as nifedipine, may also have a role to play and electrically heated gloves can be useful in winter. Sympathectomy has been used in the past but it is either ineffective or its effects are short-lived.

Revision #1

Created 2025-12-31 15:23:11 UTC by Omar Ayman

Updated 2025-12-31 15:23:11 UTC by Omar Ayman