Health Awareness

Cold, Painful Fingers Can Mean A Serious Disease

(NAPS)—"Zombie Hands." That's what can happen to an estimated 5 to 10 percent of the population when temperatures start to fall.

In a typical case of Raynaud's phenomenon, also known as Raynaud's disease or syndrome, sufferers experience numbness and pain in their fingers, toes and other extremities. Fingers turn white, blue or red as the small blood vessels go into spasm within minutes of exposure to cold or stress, and they appear to be "dead" as blood flow is constricted.

Named for the French physician Maurice Raynaud, who first recognized the condition in 1862, it causes an interruption of blood flow to the fingers, toes, nose or ears. There may be associated tingling, swelling or painful throbbing. The attacks may last from minutes to hours. In severe cases, the area may develop ulcerations and infections, which can lead to gangrene.

Raynaud's can occur as a "primary" disease—that is, with no associated disorder—or as a "secondary" condition related to other diseases, such as scleroderma, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis.

"Ninety percent of Raynaud's sufferers don't seek treatment and too many physicians pay short shrift to those who do," says Lynn Wunderman, founder and chair of the Raynaud's Association. "Treatment is important because some sufferers may have an underlying condition such as systemic scleroderma or lupus. Awareness of such a problem may allow for earlier medical intervention." Simple blood tests can rule out the presence of antibodies associated with diseases that have Raynaud's as a component.

What's Being Done

To help, the Raynaud's Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit health organization, launched a new and assertive campaign,"Don't Turn a Cold Shoulder to Painful Fingers," to urge those with the disorder—and their doctors—not to dismiss the pain that Raynaud's sufferers endure, or the lifestyle adjustments they make to minimize exposure to cold or stress.

Painful fingers that change color—"Zombie Hands"—could be a sign of a serious condition.

Although there is no known cure as yet, treatment options such as calcium channel blocker drugs have been clinically proven to alleviate symptoms by opening up the blood vessels so blood circulates more freely.

How To Lend A Warm Helping Hand

You can support the Raynaud's Association with a tax-deductible donation. Contributions help fund member mailings, the website, awareness-building efforts, and thousands of educational materials distributed each year to sufferers.

Learn More

For further facts, visit www.raynauds.org.