



What are Chilblains?

Chilblains are also referred to as pernio or perniosis. They are small, itchy, painful swellings that generally **appear on the skin after several hours of exposure to cold temperatures**. Thus, they tend to develop during the winter months.

They are more **likely to occur on the extremities** such as the toes, fingers, nose and earlobes, which are the first areas to become cold. Other areas of the skin such as the heels, thighs and lower legs can also be affected in extreme temperatures.

What Happens During Cold Exposure

A **sudden increase in temperature** and **exposure to humidity** increases the likelihood of **chilblains** developing. While one solitary chilblain may develop, **often several will join together** to form a larger, swollen red area of the skin. When the skin becomes cold, the tiny blood vessels beneath the skin narrow and constrict to prevent the loss of body heat through the skin. If the skin re-warms too quickly, there is some leakage of fluid from the blood vessels into the tissues. This causes areas of the skin to become inflamed and swollen, leading to **chilblains**.

People with poor circulation are also more prone to developing **chilblains**. However, **chilblains can affect anyone**, and after an initial outbreak, they are more likely to recur each winter. Ironically, in countries with extremely cold temperatures, **chilblains** are actually less common since the air is drier and there is less exposure to a sudden increase in external temperature.

Diagnosing Chilblains

The symptoms and signs of **chilblains** include:

- Itching, burning sensation
- Reddish appearance which may change to purple in color
- Pain and tenderness
- Skin over the chilblain may form a blister
- Skin breaks down and becomes an ulcer, causing a skin infection to develop

What Causes Chilblains?

Some people are more susceptible to **chilblains** than others. As yet, the **cause has not been determined**.

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However, there are **factors that are known to contribute to the development of [chilblains](#)** such as poor circulation, poor nutrition, anemia, a familial tendency, hormonal changes, damp living conditions, connective tissue disorders, and bone marrow disorders. Certain drugs, such as beta-blockers, may constrict tiny blood vessels and cause recurring [chilblains](#).

Help for Chilblains

[Chilblains](#) usually last for about 7-14 days, and then gradually resolve during the following week. **Treatment is not typically needed**, but there is a wide range of soothing creams and lotions available to relieve the pain.

Your doctor may prescribe a topical steroid cream to reduce the itchiness and discomfort. Heparin ointment may also help to improve circulation in the affected area. Occasionally, prescription medication is necessary.

If you suffer from diabetes or poor circulation, it is advisable to consult a podiatrist. A podiatrist can provide padding and pressure relief for chilblain symptoms, as well as reduce pain in corns and calluses. A course of UV light at the onset of winter will also benefit circulation in the feet.

Natural Treatment Options for Chilblains

There are also natural alternatives such as **herbal and homeopathic remedies** that are **highly effective in the treatment of [chilblains](#)**. These remedies are safe, gentle to use in the body, and encourage healthy circulation in all extremities.

An extremely effective herb used in traditional Chinese medicine is Ginkgo biloba, which restores the functioning of the circulatory system and improves peripheral blood flow to the extremities. Zingiber officinalis is more commonly known as Ginger, and acts as a warming circulatory stimulant and anti-inflammatory. In addition, Rosmarinus officinale (Rosemary) dilates and strengthens blood vessels and increases peripheral and cerebral circulation.

How to Prevent Chilblains

There are some ways to prevent [chilblains](#) from developing:

- Keep your hands and feet warm in cold weather by wearing thick wool socks and gloves
- Cover up with tights, long trousers, and high-top boots
- Warm up gradually and avoid heating the skin after being out in the cold
- Do not expose the skin to any source of heat such as hot water bottles and heaters, especially if your hands and feet are cold
- If the skin is broken, use an antiseptic dressing to prevent the [chilblains](#) from becoming infected
- Thermal or insulating insoles can help to keep the foot warm to prevent [chilblains](#) from developing
- Exercise vigorously before going out into the cold to improve circulation
- Stop smoking naturally, as smoking interferes with the circulation of blood through blood vessels



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Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is **not the only treatment option**. Conventional Western medicine (often called allopathic or orthodox medicine) is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools, and many pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available and freely used-- even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is 'better' than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that **both have a role to play in the treatment program**.

Natural medicine has often been frowned upon by conventional doctors, especially by those who do not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby **providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options** from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, **natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed** by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the **body has an innate capacity to heal itself**. While natural medicines are often called 'alternative' or 'complimentary' medicines, they are, in fact, a **unique and independent form of medicine** in their own right, well able to **treat a variety of conditions**. Perhaps the term 'holistic' medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine. This encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a **holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease**. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to **support health** (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer. In many cases, **holistic medicine can accomplish just as much**, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, **natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing**.

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In many cases, they can **succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed**. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a **long history of usage** and there is a **wealth of empirical evidence** to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to **support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines**.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines **must be manufactured in the correct way**, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately, **not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards**, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While **‘standardized’ extracts** may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have **grave disadvantages**, including an increase in side effects, as the medicines produced in this manner **lose the natural protective properties** of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which **retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb** as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, **always choose wisely**. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life-threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor, in order that your condition may be monitored. **Well-informed and supportive practitioners will support patients** who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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