Cold Hands And Feet

Feeling of cold hands and feet is a common problem, especially in women. Usually it is just an unpleasant sensation without any clinical significance but sometimes it may be related to other disease conditions.

Causes

Neurocirculatory disorders

This designation covers the most problems with cold limbs. It is more typical in women. It is caused by poorly identifiable and assessable nervous system disorders, especially of nerves responsible for the width of blood vessels. In situations of psychological stress or in cooler environment the blood vessels may excessively narrow. It avoids the heat loss but on the other hand it leads to poorer blood supply to the extremities. From medical point of view this is nothing serious but it can worsen life quality. The condition can be treated only symptomatically including relaxation, massages, plenty of sleep, regular rest, regular exercise and warm cover of lower extremities.

Peripheral artery disease

This disease affects usually the lower extremities and it is caused by gradual narrowing of arteries by the atherosclerosis. Most common symptom is a leg pain during walking (so-called claudication). Cold sensation may also occur because of inadequate blood supply.

Acute arterial closure

Acute closure of an artery is also more common in lower extremities. Most often it is caused by a sudden arterial obstruction by a blood clot (thrombus). There occurs shocking acute leg pain; the affected limb quickly turns pale and cold. This condition is an emergency condition and it must be urgently solved, otherwise there is a severe risk of limb necrosis and amputation.

Polyneuropathy

This group of diseases means general body nerves damage by some diseases or harmful substances. Nerves of the lower extremities tend to be the most affected because they are the longest nerves in the body. Polyneuropathy can be cause for example by diabetes, alcoholism and malignant diseases. It manifests typically by burning and tingling sensations that can be accompanied by feeling cold.

Diabetic foot

Diabetic foot is a state typical for chronic diabetics. It is usually a combination of accelerated peripheral artery disease and diabetic polyneuropathy.

Raynaud's phenomenon

This condition is caused by sudden narrowing of small finger arteries in upper extremities. The real cause is still not fully understood. The narrowing may be so significant that parts of fingers turn pale. In severe
forms the fingers may suffer from necrosis due to lack of oxygen and gangrene occurs.

**Shock conditions**

In serious conditions known as shock states the organism reduces blood flow to less important parts of the body including skin to maintain blood flow to essential organs. Cold periphery is a logical consequence.

**Diagnostic approach**

If such problem is uncomfortable, the affected person usually seeks a doctor. Medical history and physical examination should be done; it is advisable to check pulse in any affected limb. Arterial blood flow may be evaluated using ultrasound. Neurological examination including electromyography can diagnose nerve disorders. If there is a suspicion of peripheral artery disease, the best diagnostic method is the angiography.