

### Raynaud's Disease

#### RSI Conditions

The term Repetitive Strain Injury is an umbrella term used to describe a number of specific musculoskeletal conditions, as well as phenomena such as Raynaud's Disease which are less specific and include multiple factors, some of them occupational. Lack of adequate diagnosis or access to appropriate treatment can exacerbate the condition and sometimes leads to job loss and economic hardship.

#### What is Raynaud's Disease?

Raynaud's Disease is a condition in which the blood supply to the extremities is interrupted. Where occupational factors play a part, this usually means a constriction of the blood vessels in the hand leading to the symptoms in the fingers and thumb described below. It is frequently considered a nervous condition.

#### The Symptoms

During an attack the fingers become deeply blue or white and blue. Sometimes the fingers perspire. The vessels in the hand constrict until circulation ceases and the fingers deform. Sometimes gangrene will set in. It is usually painful and may be accompanied by a tingling feeling.



## **The Causes**

It is not fully understood why some people develop this condition and others do not. The nerves in the hand can shut off the blood supply in response to a variety of situations. An outbreak is usually precipitated by infection, fatigue or nervous exhaustion, particularly in cold working conditions. It is a disease that may remain dormant for years and come back

suddenly. Non-occupational forms are much more likely to occur in women. At work it can occur as a result of using vibrating machinery, when it is called *Vibration White Finger*. This condition is very persistent and is a recognised industrial injury (A11) for a range of occupations using hand-held percussive or vibrating tools.

## **The Doctor's Examination**

In the UK, GPs receive little training in the diagnosis and treatment of musculoskeletal disorders. Ideally your doctor will refer you to a specialist who has taken an interest in RSI-type conditions, usually a rheumatologist or neurologist. For a proper diagnosis of Raynaud's Disease it usually has to be in existence for at least two years. Blood tests to check the cell count and an examination of the blood vessels under the finger nails are used to check for certain forms of the disease.

## **Treatment**

There are a number of drugs which work by making the blood vessels wider, but they affect the general circulation and also cause flushing, headaches or dizziness. If the condition is work-related the nerve damage will not be rectified by drugs. It may be necessary to avoid tasks involving repetitive movements of the fingers or holding vibrating machinery.

Complementary and dietary therapies have proved helpful in some cases. These include exercise and a diet rich in salad, along with vitamin B6, vitamin E, vitamin D, riboflavin, and pantothenic acid which aid in the adrenal's capability to handle stress. Combinations of ginger, goldenseal and possibly cayenne pepper have sometimes eased the worst of the symptoms.

Smoking restricts the circulation so if you have this problem, you should avoid tobacco.

For more detailed advice, please refer to the RSI Awareness information sheet '*RSI – Its Nature And Treatment*'.