



Bristol Community Health



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Bristol Community Health

# Podiatry Department

## Chilblains



**L3**

### **What are chilblains?**

Chilblains are caused by an abnormal reaction of the blood supply to cold temperatures. Either the feet have been cold and warmed too quickly or the footwear has been too tight. Cold slows down the blood supply to the skin.

In some people it takes a long time to recover so patches of skin are damaged.

### **What do they look like?**

Red or purple blotches on the skin. Often found on the ends of the toes. They become increasingly painful, itchy and burn when the feet are warmed. Cracks may also appear which can increase the risk of infection.

### **Who is at risk?**

- the very young
- the elderly and those with poor circulation
- people who work outdoors in the cold
- people who don't wear enough warm clothing, socks or tights in the winter and those who continue to wear open toed shoes
- Poor diet can also increase the risk.

### **How can I prevent chilblains?**

- Dress warmly, several thin layers are better than one thick one. For example, tights or longjohns under trousers.
- Make sure that winter shoes can accommodate thick socks so that the shoes aren't too tight as this can push the blood away from the skin and actually increase the risk. Two pairs of thin nylons are warmer than one and don't take up much room in the shoe.

- After being out in cold damp weather warm your feet gradually. Rubbing with a towel rather than using a radiator or fire.
- Keep yourself warm at home but don't toast yourself in front of the fire. At regular intervals get up and walk around to get the blood circulating. Also have a hot meal during the day to warm up from the inside. Thick soled shoes help protect your feet from the cold ground.
- Thermal insoles are good but again make sure that there is enough room in your shoes.
- Chilblain cream can be used to prevent chilblains and they can help soothe the pain if you already have chilblains.
- Vicks vapour rub can also be used to prevent chilblains but **it should not be used on broken skin.**
- If your chilblains have cracked and become open sores seek help from your podiatrist.