

TOOLBOX TALK

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Preventing Chilblains

Chilblains, also known as pernio, are the painful inflammation of small blood vessels in your skin that occur in response to repeated exposure to cold, but not freezing, air. Chilblains don't usually result in permanent injury but can lead to infections, which may cause severe damage if left untreated.



According to the Mayo Clinic, no one knows exactly what causes chilblains. They may be an abnormal reaction of your body to cold exposure followed by rewarming. Rewarming of cold skin can cause small blood vessels under the skin to expand more quickly than nearby larger blood vessels can handle. This results in a bottleneck effect and the blood leaking into nearby tissues.

Symptoms of chilblains include:

- ◆ Small, itchy red areas on your skin, often on your feet or hands
- ◆ Possible blistering or skin ulcers
- ◆ Swelling of your skin
- ◆ Burning sensation on your skin
- ◆ Changes in skin color from red to dark blue, accompanied by pain

If your skin is exposed to cold, it's helpful to rewarm it gradually because sudden rewarming of cold skin may worsen chilblains. To prevent chilblains:

- ◆ Avoid or limit your exposure to cold.
- ◆ Dress in layers of loose clothing and wear mittens and warm, water-resistant footwear.
- ◆ Cover all exposed skin as completely as possible when going outside in cold weather.
- ◆ Keep your hands, feet, and face dry and warm.
- ◆ Keep your home and workplace comfortably warm.
- ◆ Don't smoke.