Chilblains

Advice for effective care
Many people feel the cold in the winter, but not everyone will develop chilblains. Whether they do or not depends to a large extent on the efficiency of your circulation. Chilblains are small itchy, red swellings on the skin, which can become increasingly painful, can swell and then dry out, leaving cracks in the skin, which expose you to the risk of infection. They can occur on the toes, particularly the smaller ones, fingers, the face, especially the nose, and the lobes of the ears. They can also occur on areas of the feet exposed to pressure, for instance, on a bunion, or where tight shoes squeeze the second toe.

**Cold feet**

Chilblains are caused by the skin’s abnormal reaction to cold. Damp or draughty conditions, dietary factors and hormonal imbalance can be contributory factors. If the skin is chilled and is then followed by too rapid warming next to a fire or hot water bottle, chilblains may result.

**Who is most at risk?**

This condition mainly affects young adults working outdoors in cold places or people who do not wear socks or tights in winter. Elderly people, whose circulation is less efficient than it used to be, people who don’t take enough exercise, and those suffering from anaemia are also susceptible.

**What are the symptoms?**

With the onset of the cold weather, susceptible people will experience burning and itching on their hands and feet. On going into a warm room, the itching and burning is intensified. There may be some swelling or redness, and in extreme cases, the surface of the skin may break, and sores (ulcers) may develop.

**What can you do?**

To help prevent chilblains, keep your body, feet and legs warm, especially if your circulation is poor and your mobility is limited. The whole body, rather than just the feet, needs to be kept warm. Several layers of clothing will help to keep you warm: trousers, long johns, high boots, tights and leg warmers or long socks will help. Avoid going out early if possible, when the weather is generally colder, and wrap up well with a scarf, hat, gloves and coat. Avoid ‘nipping out’ with just your indoor clothes on, even if it is only for a couple of minutes. Natural fibre materials are advisable, as these help to hold warmth in against the skin, unlike man-made materials which tend to draw the heat away.

You can also help prevent chilblains if you follow a regular foot health routine (see ‘Looking after your feet’ leaflet) and eat a healthy balanced diet.
If chilblains have developed

Don’t scratch them; soothing lotions such as witch hazel or calamine will take away most of the discomfort. If the chilblain has ulcerated, apply an antiseptic dressing. If you are concerned about the appearance of the chilblain or have diabetes or are undergoing medical treatment, have the ulcer assessed by your GP or podiatrist.

If the chilblain hasn’t broken you can paint it with a mixture of friar’s balsam and a weak solution of iodine, which your pharmacist may make up for you, or an over-the-counter preparation. At night, rub some lanolin ointment well into the feet to help retain heat and moisture.

do not

• Use sharp instruments such as razor blades to cut corns or hard skin
• Use corn paints/corn plasters which contain acid
• Use ingrowing toenail paints as these contain acid.

Further information

If there are any changes to your health which alter your ability to maintain your own footcare, or you develop any foot problems you cannot manage yourself, (or with the help of a carer or friend) complete an application form for Podiatry Services. These can be obtained from your GP practice or East Laith Gate House.

If we have not seen you for more than 6 months, we will require a further completed application form. These can be obtained from your GP practice or East Laith Gate House.

Podiatry services
East Laith Gate House
East Laith Gate
Doncaster DN1 1JE
Tel 01302 640050
We are a smokefree organisation

This information is correct at the time of publishing September 2012