

FACT SHEET TWELVE: Chilblains

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I get exceptionally cold feet in winter, and often get chilblains. How can I prevent this?

Profoot's Foot Doctor, William Hutchings of the Diss Podiatry and Chiropody Clinic, Norfolk says:

Many people suffer from cold feet in winter, but not all of them develop chilblains. Whether they do or not depends to a large extent on the efficiency of the circulation.

Chilblains are small, itchy, red swellings on the skin, which can become increasingly painful. They can also swell and then dry out leaving cracks in the skin, which expose the foot to the risk of infection. They occur on the toes, particularly the smaller ones, but can also occur on other areas of the feet exposed to pressure.

Chilblains are caused by the skin's abnormal reaction to the cold and normally occur when chilled skin is warmed too quickly. Damp or draughty conditions, dietary factors and hormonal imbalance can also cause or aggravate chilblains.

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 can be done?

- Keep your body, feet and legs warm at a regular temperature, especially if your circulation is poor and your mobility is limited
- Keep the whole body warm by wearing trousers, long boots, tights or leg warmers
- Follow a regular foot health routine, wash each day in warm soapy water and dry thoroughly, especially between the toes. Apply moisturising cream to prevent painful cracked skin.
- Try using insoles such as Profoot's Double cushion to make shoes and feet more comfortable and provide insulation from cold/frozen ground.
- If chilblains occur, use Profoot's Toe Protector or Corn Wrap to protect tender areas and moisturise dry skin.