Raynaud’s Disease

Raynaud’s disease is caused by constriction and spasms of small arteries in the extremities after exposure to cold. In the person with Raynaud’s disease, the hands (and sometimes the toes, cheeks, nose, and ears) turn white or bluish and become painful. Its cause is unknown. A condition called Raynaud’s phenomenon causes similar symptoms, but it is the result of connective tissue disease or exposure to certain chemicals. The same natural remedies are used for both disorders.

**Lifestyle changes that may be helpful:** Dressing warmly and wearing gloves or mittens are important for preventing attacks of Raynaud’s disease. Individuals with Raynaud’s disease should not smoke, because nicotine decreases blood flow to the extremities. Women with Raynaud’s disease should not use birth control pills, as this method of contraception affects circulation.

**Nutritional supplements that may be helpful:** Inositol hexaniacinate—a variation on the B vitamin niacin—has been used with some success for relieving symptoms of Raynaud’s disease.1 In one study, thirty individuals with Raynaud’s disease taking 4 grams of inositol hexaniacinate each day for three months showed less spasm of their arteries.2 Another study, involving six individuals taking 3 grams per day of inositol hexaniacinate, showed that this supplement improved peripheral circulation.3
Evening primrose oil inhibits the prostaglandins that may otherwise promote blood vessel constriction. A double blind study of twenty-one individuals with Raynaud’s disease found that, compared with placebo, evening primrose oil reduced the number and severity of attacks despite the fact that blood flow did not appear to increase. Researchers often use 3,000–6,000 mg of evening primrose oil per day.

Abnormalities of magnesium metabolism have been found in individuals with Raynaud’s disease. Symptoms similar to those seen with Raynaud’s disease occur in individuals with magnesium deficiency, probably because a deficiency of this mineral results in spasm of blood vessels. Some nutritionally oriented doctors recommend that individuals with Raynaud’s disease supplement with 200–600 mg of magnesium per day; however, no clinical studies support this treatment.

In one study, twelve people with Raynaud’s disease were given L-carnitine (1 gram three times a day) for twenty days. After receiving L-carnitine, these individuals showed less blood-vessel spasm in their fingers in response to cold exposure. This study suggests that supplementing with L-carnitine may be useful for people with Raynaud’s disease.

In a double blind study, supplementation with twelve large capsules of fish oil per day (providing 3.96 grams of eicosapentaenoic acid per day) for six or twelve weeks reduced the severity of blood-vessel spasm in five of eleven
individuals with Raynaud’s phenomenon. Fish oil was effective in people with primary Raynaud’s disease, but not in those whose symptoms were secondary to another disorder.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual supplement for information about any side effects or interactions.

**Herbs that may be helpful:** Ginkgo biloba appears to improve the circulation in small blood vessels. For that reason, some doctors of natural medicine recommend ginkgo for individuals with Raynaud’s disease. However, no studies have been published on the use of ginkgo for this purpose. Ginkgo is often used as a standard extract (containing 24% ginkgo heterosides) in the amount of 40 mg three times per day. Garlic, which is known to improve circulation, is also recommended by some doctors of natural medicine as a supportive nutrient for people with Raynaud’s disease. For those who do not mind the taste, one whole clove of raw garlic can be chewed per day. Otherwise, odor-controlled, enteric-coated tablets or capsules with standardized allicin potential can be taken in amounts of 400–500 mg once or twice per day (providing up to 5,000 mcg of allicin). As an alternative, 2–4 ml of a tincture can be taken three times daily.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual herb for information about any side effects or interactions.
References: