

Cold accentuates arterial spasm

DR. GOTT



PETER GOTT, M.D.

DEAR DR. GOTT: I'm a 28-year-old female with Raynaud's disease. I've been to many doctors, as well as two vascular surgeons, and they haven't come up with any real reason for my symptoms. My weight has decreased from 170 to 135 pounds in about one year. Is this related? I've been to so many doctors, I'm frustrated and ready to give up.

DEAR READER: Marked arterial spasm of unknown cause, associated with disruption of circulation, is called Raynaud's disease. The spasm occurs in cyclical attacks, affecting the fingers and toes — and, occasionally, the nose and tongue. It may last for minutes or hours, during which the involved tissue is deprived of oxygen; this can result in pronounced skin changes (tightness, shininess, ulceration) over the digits, possibly progressing to gangrene.

Patients with Raynaud's disease must protect themselves against cold, avoid smoking and be cautious of certain medications (such as beta blockers) because all three factors accentuate arterial spasm.

Raynaud's disease is treated with drugs, such as prazosin and calcium-channel blockers, that relax spasm. In severe cases, sympathectomy (surgery to sever nerves to the arteries) may be necessary.

I am concerned that you may have an underlying disorder causing arterial spasm. Raynaud's phenomenon is secondary to a number of diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, sclero-

derma (a disease of the body's connective tissue) and lupus erythematosus. It's important to distinguish between Raynaud's disease and Raynaud's phenomenon, because treatment of the latter condition involves therapy for the underlying disorder.

If your doctors are convinced that you have the disease and not the phenomenon, you are a candidate for vasodilator drug therapy or sympathectomy. Weight loss is not usually a symptom of Raynaud's disease, but it can be a symptom of some of the diseases that underlie the phenomenon. Don't give up. Request a referral to a vascular laboratory at a teaching hospital where super-specialists may be able to discover a cause for your problem and suggest treatment.

Because lupus is a common cause of Raynaud's phenomenon, I am sending you a free copy of my Health Report "Lupus: The Great Imitator."

DEAR DR. GOTT: I have a salty taste in my mouth at all times. The use of commercial toothpaste and mouthwash makes it worse. Three different doctors have laughed off my condition. Does this indicate a certain malady?

DEAR READER: A salty taste often indicates dental infection. Check with your dentist to make sure the source of your problem isn't a tooth abscess that can be easily treated.

DEAR DR. GOTT: Since returning from Mexico recently, I've experienced an inordinate amount of discomfort and extreme flatulence within 20 minutes of eating that lasts until 1:30 a.m. A barium enema and sigmoidoscopy diagnosed me with irritable colon, but no medication has been prescribed other than antacids. Can you help?

DEAR READER: You need meticulous stool analyses, including fecal cultures, to see if you brought home more than happy memories from Mexico. In my experience, healthy patients who develop bowel symp-

toms after traveling to Mexico and other points south of the border almost always have picked up intestinal infections.

Such infections are caused by a variety of disease-producing bacteria, as well as by parasites. Although your distress and gas could result from a common condition such as irritable colon, I'd want to make sure that a treatable infection is not present. Ask your doctor to order the appropriate tests.

To give you more information, I am sending you a free copy of my Health Report "Irritable Bowel Syndrome."

DEAR DR. GOTT: For the past six months, I've suffered facial pain on both sides of my face. It began after I had impacted wisdom teeth extracted. I was then treated by a neurologist for inflamed nerves, but there was no relief. Where do I go from here?

DEAR READER: Facial pain has many causes, ranging from neuralgia

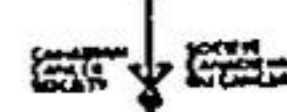
(pain from nerve irritation) and tumors to arthritis and infection. Dental infection and impacted teeth are common causes of facial pain, and — from your description — I'll bet that's your problem. Return to your dentist or request the services of an oral surgeon. You need a careful dental exam, with X-rays and — perhaps — a course of antibiotics.

DEAR DR. GOTT: I'm trying to find out about self-administered nerve blocks for relief of chronic pain. How many hours of relief can one expect from such injections? Where does a person buy the necessary equipment?

DEAR READER: Don't do it. Nerve blocks are tricky and, unless performed by an M.D. who is familiar with the technique, can result in nerve damage, infection or other serious consequences.

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