

### **PERNIO (CHILBLAIN'S)**

“Pernio” or chilblains are names for the same skin condition. Patients with pernio develop small reddish-violet spots or bumps that are itchy or painful. These lesions tend to develop on the hands and/or feet. This may be the first time you have ever seen such spots, or you may have a history of similar spots coming and going, lasting one to three weeks each time. In either case, the spots seem to appear after you have exposed yourself to cold temperatures. The word “chilblain,” actually, tells you exactly what the condition is, since the first part of the word, “chill,” refers to a sensation of coldness, and “blain” is a lesser-known English word that means “skin swelling, blister, sore or blotch.”

Basically, pernio occurs when the blood vessels of your skin, usually in your fingers and toes, respond in an unusual way to cold exposure—especially when those low temperatures coincide with dampness. Recent minor injury to these body parts may increase the likelihood of developing pernio, even during otherwise normal weather conditions. It is not certain how common pernio is in the United States, but in England—a land famous for its coldness and dampness—the incidence has been reported in as many as 10% of the general population. Pernio typically affects women more often than men; younger to middle-aged women as well as children are the most frequently affected.

Because the direct cause of pernio is exposure to cold and wet conditions, for the vast majority of affected people, the best prevention and treatment is to keep yourself warm and dry! If, however, you have the kind of pernio that has recurred over many months or years, your doctor may want to do some blood tests to make sure that there is not an underlying condition that is causing your blood vessels to overreact in this way. Very rarely, a skin biopsy of the affected area may need to be performed. For very difficult, chronic cases of pernio, there is a drug called a “calcium-channel blocker” that may help your blood vessels relax, especially if you also have high blood pressure. If you have any further questions about this disorder, please do not hesitate to ask before leaving the office!

