

Raynaud's Phenomenon and Digital Ulcers in Scleroderma

Rheumatology

Introduction

There are many different treatments which can help with Raynaud's Phenomenon and Digital Ulcers in Scleroderma and this leaflet will talk about them all. However you may need to try using a combination of them, either together or separately at different times of the year to find a regime which works for you. The doctor or specialist nurse at the hospital will recommend some treatments for you to try first, however, if you decide you want to try different ones (particularly the prescription medications), then you can discuss this with the rheumatology team.

Natural and over-the-counter therapies

People are often keen to avoid prescription medications if possible and like to try natural therapies first. These are available from many pharmacies and supermarkets as well as from health food stores.

It is recommended that all patients with Scleroderma take the following vitamins as their antioxidant effect will help to protect the blood vessels from the damage which Scleroderma causes:

- **Vitamin C** (ascorbic acid) 500 – 1000 mg daily
- **Vitamin E** (tocopheryl acetate) 200 – 400 mg daily.

In addition to vitamins C and E there are many treatments you can try. You may take more than one treatment at a time however it is best to only start taking one new one at a time in order to be able to identify whether it works. There is limited research into these treatments, however many people do find them to be effective for Raynaud's Phenomenon:

- **Gamolenic Acid (GLA) approx. 320 mg daily. You can get GLA in several ways:**
 - It can be bought on its own
 - It can be found in evening primrose, starflower and linseed or flaxseed oils, in which case you need to work out how many of the oil capsules you need to take to get the correct dose of GLA. Try and find capsules with a high level of GLA so you do not have to take too many
 - It can be found in Omega-3 fish oils. Either Maxepa 10000 mg daily (5 capsules twice each day) or Omacor 4000 mg daily (4 capsules) will provide the recommended amount of GLA. These two fish oils are available on prescription.

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- **Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available**
- **If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111**
- **Keep the environment clean and tidy**
- **Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.**

You only need to choose **one** of these ways of getting GLA. Many people find that GLA is very effective however it may take up to eight weeks to get full benefit. If there is no benefit after taking GLA for 3 months then stop and try something else.

- **Ginkgo Biloba** – Up to 240 mg daily in three doses. Some people find that this produces a significant reduction in their Raynaud's symptoms
- **Ginger** 2000 mg – 4000 mg daily
- **Hawthorn, cayenne, magnesium, horse chestnut, dong quai, and prickly ash** are also often used for treatment of circulation problems and some people report benefits in Raynaud's Phenomenon. You should speak to a complementary therapy specialist for advice on dose.

All the above treatments should be avoided if you are taking warfarin or other blood-thinning treatments.

Dietary Changes: Dietary changes to try to help Raynaud's Phenomenon include increasing consumption of omega-3 oils and antioxidant vitamins (particularly C & E). Using and eating more traditionally warming foods such as ginger, cayenne peppers and chillies can also help.

Prescription Therapies

Sometimes natural and over-the-counter therapies are not enough and it is necessary to take prescription medications. You should tell your doctor and pharmacist about all natural and prescription medicines you are taking so that they can check for any interactions. It is safe to take these prescription medications in combination with the natural therapies detailed in this leaflet. By improving the circulation, these will help to treat Raynaud's Phenomenon as well as prevent Digital Ulcers. These will take up to three weeks to take full effect but do not need to be taken permanently if you do not want to. It is quite common for them to be taken only in winter each year however they are safe to be taken permanently. You may have to try several until you find the one which works best for you.

What are the side effects of the prescription medication?

Side effects may include headaches, dizziness, flushing or low blood pressure. To try and avoid side effects it is recommended to start on a lower dose for a few days and go up to the full dose gradually.

Losartan 25 mg-100 mg daily or other angiotensin II receptor antagonists.

Diltiazem 60 mg three times daily or other calcium channel blockers.

Fluoxetine 20 mg-40 mg daily or other serotonin reuptake antagonists.

Simvastatin 10 mg-40 mg daily at night should be considered in all patients with elevated cholesterol and sometimes in other cases as there is limited evidence it may help prevent Digital Ulcers.

Clopidogrel 75 mg daily is only used for people with Digital Ulcers.

The following treatments are used in cases where people have tried many different therapies yet still suffer with Digital Ulcers. They are only available in exceptional circumstances under the supervision of The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust:

Sildenafil 25 mg three times a day.

Bosentan 62.5 mg to 125 mg twice daily.

Intravenous Therapy

As a Scleroderma sufferer you may be offered an infusion of Iloprost treatment. This involves attending our Rheumatology Day Unit to receive the drug through a drip. This will help to treat Raynaud's and to prevent Digital Ulcers occurring. If you do get Digital Ulcers which will not respond to other treatments, then you may need an extra Iloprost infusion.

Treatment of Digital Ulcers

If you develop a digital ulcer then you will need a change in treatment, however, it does not always need you to visit the hospital.

- Treat infection: If there are any signs of infection (redness, increased pain, oozing) then your GP will be able to prescribe antibiotics. The first choice is flucloxacillin 500 mg four times per day for 2 weeks (or erythromycin 500 mg four times per day if you are allergic to penicillin). If these do not help then a swab can be taken and sent to see which antibiotic the infection is sensitive too
- Increase circulation medication: This can be done either in conjunction with your GP or you can call the Rheumatology advice line. You may be able to increase the dose of a medication you are already on or it may be advised that you start an extra medication
- Do not use any creams or ointments on the skin, and if you need a dressing for protection use a clean dry dressing such as lint free gauze secured with micropore tape (available from pharmacies)
- If there is no improvement after 2-3 weeks or the finger begins to turn blue/black then you should call the Rheumatology advice line, you will need to be seen and assessed in clinic and possibly admitted for iloprost treatment.

For further information please contact the Rheumatology advice line on 01902 695491 option 2.

Acknowledgment to The Royal Free Hospital London for providing this information.

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

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ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。