Hands and feet can't seem to keep the heat [1]

Dear Alice,

My fingers and toes are always cold, even when it is really warm out. How do I keep them from being cold all the time?

Answer

Dear Reader,

There are a lot of reasons that your hands and feet could feel cold, even in 70 degree temperatures. Sometimes you?ll walk down the street and notice some people are wearing shorts and a t-shirt while others have on a jacket and scarf. Individuals vary greatly in how warm or cold they perceive the same environment to be. To learn more about factors that can make people especially susceptible to feeling cold, read I am always freezing [2]. What makes your question different, Reader, is that you specifically mention your fingers and toes are often cold, rather than feeling chilly all over. While having fingers and toes that get cold easily does not necessarily point to any medical problem, it could be a sign of an underlying condition.

Some people?s extremities simply get cold easily because of how their body regulates temperatures. It may be due to very low body fat (think less insulation to keep you warm). Others may have cold hands and feet due to an underlying condition. Often, when cold hands and feet are a symptom of an illness, other symptoms ? including hardened skin, numbness, changes in skin color, or open sores will occur with the cold feeling ? suggesting a problem with circulating blood to the body?s extremities. Some potential conditions that may contribute to cold fingers and toes include:

- Anemia [3]
- Diabetes [4]
- Drug exposure
- Frostbite
- Thyroid conditions
- Vascular obstructions
- Scleroderma
- Raynaud Syndrome
- Buerger?s disease
- Mural Thrombi
- Anorexia
• Lupus
• Cancer

Clearly, these illnesses range in seriousness from mild to severe, and it’s possible to have cold fingers and toes without any of these underlying conditions. For two of the conditions listed above, Raynaud Syndrome and Buerger’s disease, having cold hands (and sometimes feet) is actually the main symptom (whereas the others have other major symptoms). For people with Raynaud Syndrome, fingers change color and feel cold due to over-constricting of arteries in reaction to cold temperatures, emotional stress, or blunt trauma. Buerger’s disease — in which people have cold and painful fingers, skin ulcers, and gangrene (sometimes requiring amputation) — mostly affects young, male tobacco users.

Talking to a health care provider is the only way to get to the bottom of your experience of cold fingers and toes. While there may not be an underlying problem, getting it checked out will allow you to know for sure. Wishing you a warm and toasty time ahead!

Alice!

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