



Winter Chills? Cold Hands and Feet? Try These Simple Tips for Improving Circulation

By Katolen Yardley, MNIMH, Medical Herbalist

Circulatory problems can be a sign of underlying and undiagnosed health concerns such as varicose veins, thrombosis and plaque buildup in the arteries. Circulatory issues may be caused by high or low blood pressure, chilblains, Reynaud's syndrome, or diabetes. Tingling, burning, or 'pins and needles' sensations in the hands and toes are also common signs of circulatory issues and should be specifically addressed by your medical herbalist or healthcare provider. A lack of oxygen to the tissues due to disrupted circulation can lead to a whitish or bluish hue to the fingers and toes; and when left untreated, gangrene may result from chronic contraction of the arteries.

Chilblains are a common circulatory issue experienced during the winter months, in which exposure to cold weather causes localized inflammation of the blood vessels. Improving circulation will help minimize the condition and can help prevent thrombosis of the skin. Here are some simple yet effective suggestions for improving circulation and warming up those cold hands and feet during the winter months.

Tips for Improving Circulation

1. Replace the salt and pepper shaker with cayenne pepper powder. Use cayenne pepper to season your food and keep it on the counter where you would normally keep the salt shaker. Traditionally, Cayenne is known to improve circulation and improve blood flow throughout the body especially to the peripheral blood vessels.
2. Decrease the consumption of tea, coffee and caffeinated drinks such as cola and caffeine-based energy drinks. Caffeine constricts blood vessels and decreases peripheral circulation, leading to a rise in blood pressure. A high intake of caffeine promotes the release of stress hormones such as cortisol, triggering the body's 'fight or flight' response. Blood pressure becomes elevated and irritability may result.
3. Add freshly chopped garlic to your diet. Garlic is known both for its immune system boosting properties as well as for its heart health benefits. Studies have shown that garlic can improve blood cholesterol levels while decreasing the likelihood of blood platelet clumping.
4. Keep fresh ginger in your pantry and add chopped, grated or sliced fresh root to soups, stews, stir fries or even herbal teas for an added spicy flavor. Ginger is known to improve circulation and blood flow to the hands and feet. It has been used traditionally for the treatment of chilblains and for gently easing the symptoms of frostbite.
5. Use Herbal Teas to support healthy circulation. Herbal teas such as ginger root, hawthorn berries, yarrow flowers, linden leaves, rosemary leaves and ginkgo leaves are rich in flavonoids

and strengthen the walls of blood vessels, improving circulation. When used long-term, they may help reduce hypertension.

6. Uncross your legs. Frequent leg crossing looks pleasing to the eye, but can hinder circulation, further contributing to broken veins and spider veins.
7. Choose Movement! Instead of sitting for long periods of time, take a moment to raise both legs off the floor and flex and point your toes or take a time-out moment and walk. Sitting for long periods of time can decrease blood flow to the peripheries and raise the risk of thrombosis, or clot formations in veins deep within the body.
8. Try some home remedies for circulatory issues. Chilblains can cause surface inflammation, itching and redness of the hands and feet. Traditional home remedies include rubbing the affected hands and feet with raw onion, or bathing in potato water (hot water containing grated fresh potato). Apple cider vinegar is also used as a topical soak to improve circulation.
9. Exercise on a regular basis. Increasing the pumping mechanism of the heart is extremely important for cardiovascular health. Exercise enhances blood flow, improves the circulation of blood from the heart to the peripheries, helps reduce obesity and regulates blood pressure.
10. Decrease the intake of trans fatty acids (bad fats contained in margarine, shortening, and many processed foods) and avoid deep fried and fatty foods. Increase the intake of Omega 3 fatty acids from flax seed oil, fish oils, extra virgin olive oil and deep sea- cold water fish such as: mackerel, herring, salmon and halibut.
11. Try dry skin brushing to improve circulation. Using a vegetable bristle brush, begin brushing from the feet and work up towards the heart, brushing in a clockwise, circular motion. Avoid brushing over areas of varicose veins, thin skin or open wounds.
12. Keep hands and feet warm in cold weather and wear gloves whenever possible.
13. Supplement with Vitamin C and bioflavonoids. Unbeknownst to many, bioflavonoids enhance the absorption of the Vitamin C, increasing its effects in the body. Types of Bioflavonoids include quercetin, rutin and hesperetin. Not supplied by the body, we must obtain the benefits of these nutrients from the foods that we eat and through nutritional supplements. Bioflavonoids are found in peppers, buckwheat, apricots, the white rind inside of the peel of citrus fruits, berries, rosehips, blueberries, grapefruits, watercress, kale, elderberries, paprika, garlic and onions. Ensure that your choice of Vitamin C contains bioflavonoid or take an extra supplement of mixed bioflavonoid with your Vitamin C. Bioflavonoids work together with Vitamin C to strengthen the walls of blood vessels and capillaries and to promote circulation.

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