

Perniosis is an inflammatory disorder that is triggered by prolonged exposure to cold and damp (humid) conditions. It is a form of inflammation of the small blood vessels (vasculitis) and is characterized by painful, itchy, tender, skin lesions on the lower legs, hands, toes, feet, ears and face. The lesions usually last for two to three weeks. One form of the disorder affects the blood vessels of the thighs. The exact cause of perniosis is unclear. Cold weather causes the small veins and arteries close to the skin to tighten or constrict. When the tissues are rewarmed, blood leaks into the tissue and causes the skin to swell. The swelling irritates the nerves, and pain is the result. It is thought by some that the disorder may represent an allergic reaction or hypersensitivity to the cold. Prolonged exposure to the cold, insufficient protective clothing, and circulatory or cardiovascular diseases may also be causative factors. Some cases are believed to be caused by genetic factors. Other suspected causes include nutrition, local infection, hormonal changes, and other systemic diseases. Perniosis is seen more often in females than in males. Also, it is seen more often in women who are very thin. Several articles in the medical literature focus on cases of perniosis in anorexic women. Individuals with poor circulation and smokers are affected more frequently than the general population. The disorder is more common in damp climates than in dry ones. Symptoms usually begin before the age of 20 years. Diagnosis is the result of physical examination and the close examination of the process of rewarming.