



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Fingers that change color

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Fingers that change color

Fingers or toes may change color when they are exposed to cold temperatures or stress, or when there is a problem with their blood supply.

Causes

These conditions can cause fingers or toes to change color:

- Buerger disease
- Chilblains (painful inflammation of small blood vessels)
- Cryoglobulinemia
- Frostbite
- Necrotizing vasculitis
- Peripheral artery disease
- Raynaud phenomenon (sudden change in the finger color ranges from pale to red to blue)
- Scleroderma
- Systemic lupus erythematosus

Home Care

Things you can do to help prevent this problem include:

- Avoid smoking.
- Avoid exposure to cold in any form.
- Wear mittens or gloves outdoors and when handling ice or frozen food.
- Avoid getting chilled, which may happen following any active recreational sport or other physical activity.
- Wear comfortable, roomy shoes and wool socks.
- When outside, always wear shoes.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your health care provider if:

- Your fingers change color and the cause is not known.
- Your fingers or toes turn black or the skin breaks.

What to Expect at Your Office Visit

Your provider will perform a physical exam, which will include close examination of your hands, arms, and fingers.

Your provider will ask questions about your medical history and symptoms, including:

- Did the fingers or toes suddenly change color?
- Has the color change occurred before?
- Does the cold or changes in your emotions cause your fingers or toes to turn white or blue?
- Did the skin color changes occur after you had anesthesia?
- Do you smoke or use tobacco?
- Do you have other symptoms such as finger pain? Arm or leg pain? A change in the texture of your skin? Loss of hair on your arms or hands?

Tests that may be done include:

- Antinuclear antibody blood test
- Blood differential
- Complete blood count (CBC)
- Comprehensive metabolic panel
- Duplex Doppler ultrasound of the arteries to the extremities
- Serum cryoglobulins
- Serum protein electrophoresis
- Urinalysis
- X-ray of your hands and feet

Treatment depends on the underlying cause.

Alternative Names

Blanching of the fingers; Fingers - pale; Toes that change color; Toes - pale

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