



Frostbite



Overview

This skin and tissue damage comes from extreme cold. Frostbite can happen to any part of your body. And it can be very serious.

Causes and risk factors

How do you get frostbite? Well, it happens when a part of your body is exposed to cold temperatures for too long. You're more likely to get frostbite if you have poor blood flow, or if your blood vessels have a tendency to constrict easily when exposed to cold. It's more common in people who have diabetes, and in people who smoke. And, certain medications increase your risk.

Symptoms

Frostbite may begin with a "pins and needles" feeling, and then numbness. Your skin may become hard, pale and cold. It may ache and throb. When it warms up, it may be red and very painful. If your frostbite is severe, you may get blisters. Frostbite may damage your skin, tendons, muscles, nerves and bone. That can lead to a condition we call "gangrene." A body part with gangrene may need to be amputated.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the severity of the frostbite. Minor frostbite may heal without permanent damage. Severe frostbite must be treated by a doctor. Your healthcare provider will create a care plan that's right for you.