Frostnip & Frostbite

You have an injury from freezing cold. The toes, fingers, and earlobes often get frostnip. This happens when the cold area suddenly becomes numb and looks white. If you do not warm up the cold area quickly, frostbite can occur. This means deeper tissues have been damaged and medical treatment is needed.

Frostbite causes blisters to form over the injured area 1 to 2 days after the cold exposure. Over the next 2 to 3 weeks the injured area darkens, and in time separates from the healing tissue under it. Do not walk on frostbitten feet. **Keep the injured area elevated and wrapped in clean dressings. Do not break any blisters; they are sterile and protect the injury from infection**. Further treatment may include a tetanus booster, antibiotics, whirlpools, or even surgery. Lukewarm vinegar soaks twice daily for 15 minutes are helpful. (Try 3 tablespoons of white vinegar per quart of water.)

It may take several months for a frostbite injury to heal. The healed skin is usually more sensitive to heat and cold.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow up with your caregiver or specialist as recommended. Treatment of frostbite may require several visits and careful management of the injured tissues. The failure to follow up as recommended may result in loss of tissue, chronic pain or disability.
- Be sure to watch for signs of infection (increasing pain, redness, red streaks, pus drainage).

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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