Dear Alice,

I have experienced numbness in my left, actually 3 fingers of my left hand. It happens off and on and the numbness will last 2-3 hours. It feels as if the fingers have "fallen asleep" and I've tried everything from shaking my hand to jumping around to get blood back to the fingers. Could this be a blocked blood vessel located in my arm/hand? I have had this problem for 2-3 months and it does not seem to get any better. I imagine I will see a doctor, but would like to hear your explanation.

Answer

Dear Reader,

If your digits keep falling asleep, maybe they're just tired! Alas, that is not possible and although there are many potential causes of your tingling fingers, a blocked blood vessel (as you suppose) is not the likely culprit. Instead, it is possible that you may have a vitamin deficiency, pinched/constricted nerve in your wrist, shoulder, or neck, or carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS). All of these could potentially lead to long-term discomfort, so your intention to visit a health care provider is smart. S/he will be the best qualified to make that final diagnosis and suggest appropriate treatment. In the meantime, here are brief explanations of these conditions and some home remedies you may want to test out:

- **B12 Deficiency.** Often resulting in numbness in the hands and feet, a vitamin B12 deficiency may be caused by a diet low in B12-rich foods (like meat, eggs, and dairy), chronic alcoholism, or intestinal disorders. These symptoms and others such as a paleness, diarrhea, and fatigue, occur because B12 is a vitamin essential in nervous system functioning and production of blood cells. Clinical treatment involves B12 supplements taken orally or in shot form. If you're looking for something you can do right away, try incorporating more foods high in B12 into your diet.

- **Pinched Nerve.** From head to toe, our bodies are connected by a complicated web of muscles, nerves, ligaments, tendons, and all sorts of other great things. Sometimes when something is out of whack in one part, we feel it somewhere else. The numbness you are feeling in your hands may actually be resulting from a pinched nerve in your shoulder or neck. Stretching and practicing relaxation techniques may help loosen tight muscles that could be contributing. If that doesn't help, aspirin and other anti-inflammatory drugs could help ease the problem. However, if the numbness persists, the problem may need some extra clinical attention.
- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.** This is often experienced by people who work in occupations which require them to put a lot of pressure on their wrists (such as construction workers and mechanics). CTS often causes numbness in the wrists and hands. The carpal tunnel runs on the underside of the wrist, protecting nerves running the length of the arm. It may become constricted when too much force is put on it. As a result, the nerves inside begin to feel the pressure. At its worst, CTS may require surgery, but many people find that taking frequent breaks from work (whether on the computer or with a jackhammer), stretching, and keeping hands and wrists warm helps reduce discomfort.

Read more about each one of these tingle triggers and potential remedies in the Related Q&As below. If the numbness you're experiencing continues and interferes with your daily activities, you may want to consider seeing a health care provider who could offer more effective, long-term solutions. You may also want to ask yourself the following questions before you see the doctor: Which three fingers are affected? How often does it happen? Daily? Weekly? Does your job or other recreational activities involve any repetitive motion that might cause your wrist to twist or otherwise be put in an awkward position? Can you identify any activities that seem to be associated with the problem? Answering these questions and then discussing with your health care provider will help you get to the root of the problem.

Students at Columbia on the Morningside campus can make an appointment with a health care provider by calling Medical Services [2] at 212-854-2284 or logging on to Open Communicator [3]. For students on the Medical Center campus, try scheduling an appointment with Student Health [4] by calling 212-305-3400.

Unfortunately, sometimes it takes more than shaking and jumping to wake up sleepy fingers!

Alice!

Category:
General Health [5]
Body Maintenance [6]
Environmental Health [7]

**Related questions**

Prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome [8]
Vitamin supplements good for health? [9]
Carpal tunnel syndrome [10]
Pinched nerve [12]
Aroused with numb fingers? [13]

Published date:
Nov 08, 1996
Last reviewed on:
Nov 09, 2012
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/tingling-fingers#comment-0

Links