

BUERGER'S DISEASE

WHAT IS BUERGER'S DISEASE?

Buerger's Disease is vasculitis causing insufficient blood flow to the hands and feet, producing numbness, tingling and ultimately skin ulcers and gangrene. The classic Buerger's patient is a male, smoker, (it is associated with exposure to nicotine) between the ages of 20 and 40, although there is a higher percentage of women and people over the age of 50 being diagnosed. Buerger's disease is most common in Southeast Asia, India and the Middle East, but appears to be rare among African-Americans.

SYMPTOMS

Buerger's disease symptoms include:

- Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet.
- Pale, reddish or blue-tinted hands or feet.
- Pain that may come and go in your legs and feet or in your arms and hands. This pain may occur when you use your hands or feet and eases when you stop that activity (claudication), or when you're at rest.
- Fingers and toes that turn pale when exposed to cold (Raynaud's phenomenon).
- Painful open sores on your fingers and toes.

CAUSES

The exact cause of Buerger's disease is unknown. While tobacco use clearly plays a role in the development of Buerger's disease, it's not clear how it does so. It's thought that chemicals in tobacco may irritate the lining of your blood vessels, causing them to swell.

Experts suspect that some people may have a genetic predisposition to the disease. It's also possible that the disease is caused by an autoimmune response in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue.