

What your hands can reveal about your health



Your doctor doesn't have to be palm readers to make predictions about your health. Your hands speak volumes, especially when something's not working right. Their form, function, and appearance can offer important prognostic and diagnostic clues. "You can learn a lot by looking at the hands," said Kelly Weselman, MD, communications chair for the American College of Rheumatology and a rheumatologist with WellStar Rheumatology in Smyrna, Georgia. Here are some common signs and symptoms your hands reveal:

Weak hand grip: In business, a wimpy handshake says something about your personality. In medicine, it can be a sign of deteriorating health. "During the physical exam for patients, we definitely pay attention to someone's hand grip," says Anne Albers, MD, a cardiologist with OhioHealth Heart & Vascular Physicians in Columbus. "We associate it with frailty," she says. Decreased grip strength coupled with a slow gait may actually portend a higher risk of death from heart disease in the elderly, according to a 2016 review in the *International Journal of Cardiology*. More recently, a PLOS One study of adults 40 to 69 found stronger hand grip may be a sign of healthy heart function and structure. Based on these findings, researchers suspect hand grip could one day become a useful measure for identifying people at high risk of developing heart disease.

Tiny red bumps or blisters: A red rash on your hand or wrist, sometimes morphing into oozing blisters, may be a sign of nickel allergy. Sensitivity to nickel is one of the most common causes of allergic contact dermatitis, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Lots of objects that touch your skin contain nickel: bracelets, watches, rings, even cell phones. But did you know you can also develop a hand rash from ingesting foods containing nickel? "Nickel is especially high in beans, chocolate, peanuts, soy, oatmeal, and granola," says Salma Faghri de la Feld, MD, assistant professor in the department of dermatology at Emory University in Atlanta. "You can determine if this applies to you by doing a trial of avoiding foods with nickel," she says.

Numb or tingly hands: Pins and needles in your hands? If you're a young, healthy person, it's likely carpal tunnel syndrome. Many people experience nighttime tingling or numbness because they sleep with their wrists bent. That bend compresses the median nerve leading from the wrist to the hand, explains the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. But there are lots of other reasons for hand numbness and tingling. For example, you might experience temporary tingling in your fingers if you're hyperventilating because you're anxious, he says. One cautionary note: "Any sudden onset of numbness or weakness (of the arms or hands) should always make someone worried about potential stroke," Dr. Barrett adds. In that event, call 911.



This healthy living information is provided by your Doctor of Chiropractic and the Idaho Association of Chiropractic Physicians (IACP).