

Nail Problems

There are many types of Nail Problems. You should visit your podiatrist for the following:

- Fungus Nails
- Ingrown Nails
- Thick and Painful Nails

Fungus Nails

Fungal infections are very common on both fingernail and toenails. It is a living organism that thrives in dark, damp environments such as under and around nails. Toes are more likely to be affected by fungus since it is attracted to a dark and damp environment which is more common on the foot than on the hand.

In more severe conditions, affected nails can have a yellowish or brownish discoloration. They may thicken or become brittle over time, and may even shed. Sometimes the nails have crumbling edges. It can be embarrassing, unsightly, disfiguring, and at times, painful.

The nail itself provides a protective covering that allows the fungus to grow underneath. An accumulation of keratinous debris is usually found beneath the free edge of the infected nail.

Other names for toenail fungus are: onychomycosis of the nail plate and tinea of the nails.

How to Avoid Nail Fungus

Toenail and athlete's foot fungi like to grow in warm, moist areas, which include public areas such as spas, swimming pools, locker rooms, or showers. For short periods of time fungus can live in warm puddles on tile floors, awaiting someone to step in and pick up the spores. Wear sandals, water shoes, or swimming booties they will help to keep your feet from touching the floor directly. Some public swimming pool areas have small wade-through pools which help to keep the toenail and athlete's foot fungi in check. After your session at the pool or other public area, wash your feet thoroughly and dry them well.

Tips:

- Wear natural cotton socks
- When drying your feet, only use your towel once on your fungus area, then wash it

- Do not share your towels or wash cloths with others; you may spread or collect spores
- Use a paper towel or toilet paper to dry your affected area, and throw away when finished
- Wear breathable shoes
- Do not use nail polish until the disease is gone
- File the infected nail thin so that a local treatment can penetrate the nail more effectively
- Are you eating a lot of sugar in your food? Some people suggest reducing sugar consumption will make your body less capable of hosting fungi

What is an Ingrown Toenail?

When a toenail is ingrown, it is curved and pushes into the skin, usually at the nail borders (the sides of the nail). This “digging in” of the nail irritates the skin, creating pain, inflammation, swelling, and warmth in the toe.

If an ingrown nail causes a tear in the skin, bacteria may enter and cause an infection in the area, which is often detected by drainage and a foul odor. However, even if the toe isn't painful, red, swollen, or warm, a nail that curves downward into the skin can progress to an infection.

Causes

Causes of ingrown toenails include:

- Heredity - In many people, the tendency for ingrown toenails is inherited.
- Trauma - Sometimes an ingrown toenail is the result of trauma, such as stubbing your toe, having an object fall on your toe, or engaging in activities that involve repeated pressure on the toes, such as kicking or running.
- Improper trimming - The most common cause of ingrown toenails is cutting your nails too short. This encourages the skin next to the nail to fold over the nail.
- Improperly sized footwear - Ingrown toenails can result from wearing socks and shoes that are tight or short.
- Nail Conditions - Ingrown toenails can be caused by nail problems, such as fungal infections or losing a nail due to trauma.

Treatment

Those who have medical conditions that put feet at high risk, such as diabetes, nerve damage in the foot, or poor circulation should always visit your podiatrist or primary physician.

After examining the toe, the podiatrist (foot and ankle surgeon) will select the treatment best suited for you. If an infection is present, an oral antibiotic may be prescribed.

Sometimes a minor surgical procedure, often performed in the office, will ease the pain and remove the offending nail. After applying a local anesthetic, the doctor removes part of the nail's side border. Some nails may become ingrown again, requiring removal of the nail root. In this instance laser surgery may be suggested.

Following the nail procedure, a light bandage will be applied. Most people experience very little pain after surgery and may resume normal activity the next day. If your foot and ankle surgeon has prescribed an oral antibiotic, be sure to take all the medication, even if your symptoms have improved.

Prevention

Many cases of ingrown toenails may be prevented by:

- Proper trimming - Cut toenails in a fairly straight line, and don't cut them too short. You should be able to get your fingernail under the sides and end of the nail.
- Well-fitted shoes and socks - Don't wear shoes that are short or tight in the toe area. Avoid shoes that are loose, because they too cause pressure on the toes, especially when running or walking briskly.

Thick Toenails

Injury to the root of the nail can disfigure it temporarily, while severe or repeated injury can permanently distort a nail. People who take part in sports such as soccer can experience this kind of damage.

Skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema will ruin a nail as well if the area around the nails is affected. This is because nails are really made up of dead skin cells that have been stacked together very tightly. Just as the skin becomes red and irritated by a skin condition, the tissues around the root of the nail where the nail is produced become inflamed and this can be the cause of thick toenails.

If the problem is being caused by a fungus, other signs are usually present. Before thick toenails developed, there was probably some yellowish or brownish discoloration of otherwise healthy looking nail. The nail may have begun to separate from the nail bed and the discolorations and separation may have moved slightly from the nail tip toward the root. A fungus, growing in the nail bed and gradually sending out filamentous organs into the substance of the nail causes these typical signs and is often the cause of thick toenails.

Regardless of what is causing the problem, your podiatrist can help thick toenails to be reduced somewhat by careful filing and trimming. This is a good approach for both cosmetic and health reasons: the nail will look better, feel more comfortable in a shoe, and, if fungus turns out to be the cause of thick toenails, it will be easier to treat if the nail is thinner.