

Ingrown Toenails

Ingrown nails, the most common nail damage, are nails whose corners or sides dig painfully into the soft tissue of nail grooves. This can often lead to irritation, redness, and swelling. Usually, toenails grow straight out. Sometimes, one or both corners or sides curve and grow into the flesh. The big toe is the most common area for this condition. Other toes can also become affected.

Causes

Ingrown toenails may be caused by the following:

- Improperly trimmed nails.
- Heredity.
- Shoe pressure; crowding of toes.
- Repeated trauma to the feet from normal activities.

Symptoms

The following symptoms may be present with ingrown toenails:

- Pain
- Redness and swelling
- Drainage
- Odor
- Prominent skin tissue (proud flesh)

Home Treatment

If you think you may have an infection due to an ingrown toenail, soak the foot in warm saltwater, or a bowl of soapy water. Then apply an antiseptic and bandage the area.

People with diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, or other circulatory disorders must avoid any self-treatment and get podiatric medical care as soon as possible. Other “do-it-yourself” treatments, including any attempt to remove any part of an infected

nail or the use of over-the-counter medicines, should be avoided. Nail problems should be evaluated and treated by a podiatrist. They can diagnose the condition and then prescribe medicine or another treatment right for you.

When to Visit a Podiatrist

See a podiatrist right away if any drainage or excessive redness is present around the toenail. Also, if a short trial of home treatment has not shown improvement in the condition, see your podiatrist. If you have diabetes or poor circulation, get immediate treatment at the first signs of an ingrown toenail. It can lead to more serious problems.

Diagnosis and Treatment

A podiatrist will remove the ingrown portion of the nail. They may also prescribe a topical or oral medicine to treat the infection. If ingrown nails are a chronic problem, your podiatrist can perform a procedure to permanently prevent ingrown nails. The corner of the nail that ingrows, along with the matrix or root of that piece of nail, are removed by using a chemical, laser, or other methods.

Prevention

- Trim toenails properly:
 - Cut them straight across, not longer than the tip of the toes.
 - **Do not** dig into corners and only gently round off corners with a nail file.
 - Use toenail clippers.
- Avoid shoes with pointy or narrow toe boxes.
- Never rip or tear edges of nails.