



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Therapy Services Fact Sheet

Ingrown Toenails

An ingrown toenail causes pain and/or inflammation due to the nail growing into the skin. An infection may or may not be present.

Known causes of ingrown nails are improper cutting of nails, self-treatment with over the counter medications, inherited nail deformities, fungal infections, improper footwear, hosiery and elastic stockings, trauma, bunion deformity causing pressure against the second toe, pregnancy, obesity, repetitive pressure from athletic or work activities, and incorrect foot biomechanics (eg. feet rolling in).

Evaluation

It is essential that a Podiatrist evaluate a painful nail immediately. They can ascertain whether the pain is due to an ingrown toenail or other causes.

Treatment

Ingrown nails usually resolve very quickly after the offending nail is removed. The offending nail is removed by trimming the nail corner or in some cases removing the edge of the nail back to the cuticle. When needed a local anaesthetic is used to lessen the discomfort.

How long should I wait to see my Podiatrist?

You should see your Podiatrist as soon as possible. Chronic ingrown nails cause abnormal skin to form around the nail. This abnormal skin may cause recurrent nail infections and make the area more difficult to treat.

How should I treat my toenail?

Soak in a dilute solution of WARM, not hot water and a handful of salt. Soak for 10–15 minutes, 1-2 times a day. Apply an antiseptic like Betadine and keep the area covered with a dressing such as Handypor (not a plastic bandaid).

How long should it take for my pain and/or infection to resolve?

Your discomfort and infection should resolve very quickly. If your nail is still causing problems after one week you should see your Podiatrist immediately.

Do I need Antibiotics if I have an infected ingrown toenail?

Most cases do NOT require antibiotics after the offending portion of the nail is removed. However, if you are already taking antibiotics, finish the prescription.

What if my ingrown nail is a recurrent problem?

If your nail becomes ingrown frequently, permanent removal of the nail or nail border may be required.

Most cases only require permanent removal of the portion of the nail that is ingrown – the rest of your nail is unchanged. The procedure itself is simple and patients generally return to normal activities very quickly after surgery. A vast majority of patients have significant improvement and are able to return to normal activities without having to worry about recurrent ingrown nails.

Prevention

How can I prevent nail problems?

Trimming your nails properly and wearing the right shoes can prevent most nail problems. If you are a diabetic or have a vascular disease you should always have your Podiatrist trim your nails.

Proper trimming

Trim your toe nails straight across without cutting down into the corners. Individuals performing “bathroom surgery” cause most ingrown toenail infections. Many individuals when self-treating, tear the nail; leaving a spike of nail under the skin.

Proper shoes

To prevent ingrown nails look for shoes with enough room to allow your toes to wiggle, made of natural material such as leather. Supportive, lace up shoes allow for more room than slip on shoes. Shoes should be an adequate depth and width, preferably with laces or velcro straps, as the foot will be supported at the heel without slipping forward into the toe area.

Contact your Podiatrist if you have any queries about ingrown toenails.

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