

MANAGING YOUR INGROWN TOENAIL



An ingrown nail occurs when a toenail (or fingernail) has a sharp end that grows down and burrows into the flesh of the finger or toe. Any finger or toe can have an ingrown nail, but usually big toes are affected. Untreated, ingrown toenails can lead to serious infections.

Predisposing factors for an ingrown toenail include:



Wearing shoes that are too small



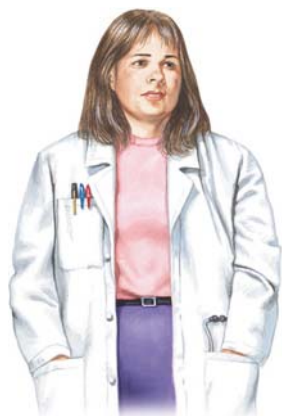
Diabetes



Bone deformities or toe injuries



Symptoms include a hard, swollen, and tender toe around the nail. This area becomes red and very sore and feels warm. Skin grows over the ingrown nail.



Your doctor makes a diagnosis by looking at and examining your nail and toe. If the toe area with the ingrown nail is infected, the doctor may take a sample of pus or fluid to determine which type of bacteria is causing the infection.

What Is an Ingrown Toenail?

An ingrown nail occurs when a toenail (or fingernail) has a sharp end that grows down and burrows into the flesh of the finger or toe. Any finger or toe can have an ingrown nail, but usually the big toes are affected. Untreated, ingrown toenails can lead to serious skin and bone infections.

What Causes an Ingrown Toenail?

Causes include wearing shoes that are too small, using the wrong method to trim the nail, bone abnormalities, or a toe injury such as stubbing the toe. People who are elderly, who have diabetes, or who have problems with blood circulation in their legs have greater chances of having ingrown toenails. This is also true of children and teenagers who may outgrow their shoes. Nails tend to thicken with age, which leads to elderly people having ingrown toenails.

What Are the Symptoms of an Ingrown Toenail?

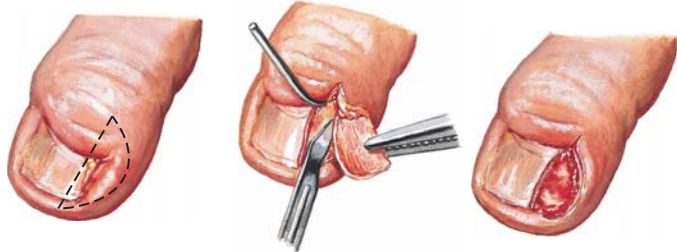
Symptoms include a hard, swollen, and tender toe around the nail. This area becomes red and very sore and feels warm. Skin grows over the ingrown nail. If the toe becomes infected, pus or fluid may drain from the toe.

How Is an Ingrown Toenail Diagnosed?

The doctor makes a diagnosis by looking at and examining the nail and toe. If the ingrown nail is infected, the doctor may take a sample of pus or fluid and send it for study to find out which bacteria is causing the infection.

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For a mild problem, soaking the foot or hand in warm, soapy water several times daily may solve the problem. Lifting the edge of the ingrown nail gently and putting some cotton under the nail to separate it from the toe may help. For a severely infected toe or ingrown toenails that keep coming back, the doctor may remove part of the nail.



Dashed line shows incision line.

Part of nail and nail bed is removed.

After surgery



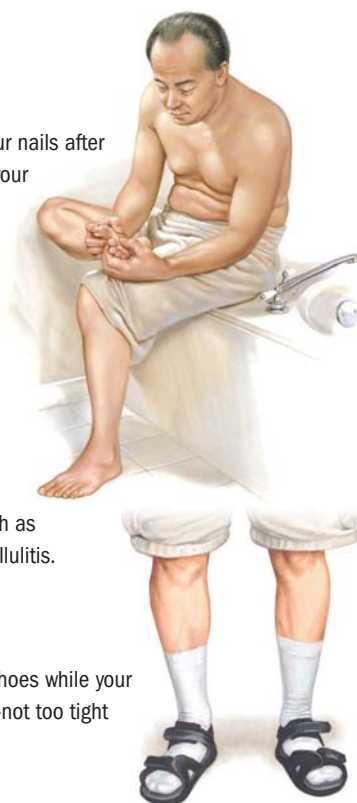
Cut your toenails properly: straight across with no rounded corners or sharp edges. Don't cut them too short. If you don't want to or can't cut your toenails yourself, go to a podiatrist.

Clean and dry areas around your nails after a bath or shower. Always keep your feet clean. Check them daily, especially if you have diabetes.



Call your doctor if you develop a fever or red streak going from your foot up your leg. You may have a serious infection such as thrombophlebitis or cellulitis.

Wear clean socks and open-toed shoes while your toe heals. Wear shoes that fit well—not too tight or too short.



How Is an Ingrown Toenail Treated?

If the problem isn't severe, soaking the foot or hand in warm, soapy water several times each day may solve the problem. Lifting the edge of the ingrown nail gently and putting some cotton under the nail to separate it from the toe may help. For a severely infected toe or ingrown toenails that keep coming back, the doctor may remove part of nail. The doctor will numb the toe and use scissors to cut away the ingrown part of the toenail. A podiatrist, a doctor who specializes in foot problems, can also remove the toenail.

The doctor will prescribe antibiotic medicine for an infected toe with an ingrown nail. People with diabetes can have serious complications from ingrown toenails, such as sores (foot ulcers), which could need surgery.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing an Ingrown Toenail:

- ✓ **DO** wear clean socks and open-toed shoes while your toe heals.
- ✓ **DO** clean and dry the areas around your nails after a bath or shower. Always keep your feet clean.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you develop a fever or red streak going from your foot up your leg. You may have a serious infection such as thrombophlebitis or cellulitis.
- ✓ **DO** wear shoes that fit well (not too short or too tight).
- ✓ **DO** cut your toenails properly. Cut straight across with no rounded corners. Don't cut them too short. If you don't want to or can't cut your toenails yourself, go to a podiatrist.
- ⊗ **DON'T** cut into your nails on the side so that you have a sharp edge. The edge may grow into the toe around the nail.
- ⊗ **DON'T** pick at your toenails or tear them off.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Academy of Family Physicians
Tel: (800) 274-2237
Website: <http://familydoctor.org>
- American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons
Tel: (800) 421-2237
Website: <http://www.acfas.org>