



Fungal Nail

Patient Information

What is it?

Fungal nail infection which is also known as '*Onychomycosis*' and/or '*Tinea Unguium*' and is a fungal infection of the skin beneath the nail (nail bed) that causes visual and physical changes to the actual nail (nail plate). It is recognised by its distinctive discolouration which can be anything from white, through to yellow, brown or even black. It is important to remember, however, that there are other causes of nail discolouration and nail fungus is often reported more often than it is actually present. It is crucial to get a Foot Health Professional to take a look if fungal nail is suspected.

What causes it?

The fungal organisms responsible are typically a group of fungi called 'dermatophytes' but sometimes non-dermatophyte fungi such as candida can cause a fungal nail infection. The fungal organisms are often found naturally on our skin, but infection occurs when, for one reason or another, these organisms colonise and infect tissue. Most commonly, nail fungus occurs secondary to skin fungus of the foot (*Tinea Pedis* — more commonly referred to as 'Athlete's Foot') which is characterised by red, itchy, flaky patches of skin. It is important that the Foot Health Professional assesses the feet thoroughly to check for fungal skin infection when there is suspected fungal nail infection.

How do I treat it?

Fungal nail infection is typically difficult to treat as the nail plate acts as a physical barrier to where the infection is rife (under the nail). There are, however, some remedies that have been proven to be effective. They are:-

Amorolfine 596 nail lacquer — this acts in such a way that the formulation can penetrate the nail plate and work under the nail. Treatment is usually one application weekly over several months.

Lamisil 1% spray — This is only effective if there is access to the nail bed. Thus either the loose nail is cut back far enough, small holes are drilled painlessly into the nail or it is surgically removed under a local anesthetic.

Oral medication (Terbinafine) Prescription only — these are safe and effective tablets that can be used to eradicate the infection. They are subject to a nail sample testing positive for fungus and a GP raising no safety concerns after a standard liver function test. These are usually taken for a few months.

The treatment option best suited, will be based upon the clinical presentation, the history of the problem, medical history and personal decision. This is why it is vital to seek out the advice of a Foot Health Professional or Podiatrist before deciding on any home treatment. At best, home treatments may be ineffective and at worst, harmful. Indeed, not all of these proven treatments are available without special provision or prescription from an appropriately qualified professional.