



Ingrown Toenail

Patient Information

What is it?

The nail becomes ingrown when the side of the nail cuts into the skin next to the nail, this can become painful. The skin next to the nail may also become infected or inflamed. Any toe can be affected but it is usually the big toe, it is a common problem, especially in teenagers and young adults. However, ingrown toenails can also occur in babies and toddlers.

Early on, the skin around the ingrown nail may become reddened and feel slightly tender, if this then progresses and becomes infected, it may become more swollen, red and painful. If the infection gets worse, there may be some fluid (pus) oozing from around the nail. Ingrown toenail pus is usually yellow or green. The nail will become even more painful and there may be an overgrowth of skin around it.

What causes it?

An ingrown toenail is usually caused by a sharp spike of nail growing into the skin beside it. This can happen as a result of various factors. Not trimming the nails correctly, wearing poorly-fitting shoes or tight socks, and sweating a lot (during exercise, for example) can be contributors. Shoes which force the toes towards each other encourage the nail to grow into the skin. For example, tight shoes, high heels and pointed-toe shoes. Active, sporty people may be more prone to ingrown toenails as they sweat more. Ingrown toenails may occur more often in people who have nails which are deformed in some way, although often there is no apparent reason why it occurs.

It is also more common in people who cut their toenails very short and round. The correct way of cutting nails is straight across, this helps the nail to grow normally and may prevent ingrown toenails from developing.

Other possible causes are injury to the nail, a fungal infection of the nail, or possibly, medication such as isotretinoin.

When a spike of nail pierces the skin of the toe, it allows the germs that are normally harmlessly present on the skin to get underneath the skin and cause infection.

How do I treat it?

If the ingrowing part of the nail is small, a non-surgical fix may be possible. It may be prevented from becoming worse, and sometimes cured.

Home remedy options:-

- Soak the toe in water for 10 minutes to soften the folds of skin around the affected nail.
- Using a cotton wool bud, push the skin fold over the ingrown nail down and away from the nail. Do this starting at the root of the nail and move the cotton wool bud towards the end of the nail.

- Repeat each day for a few weeks, allowing the nail to grow.
- As the end of the nail grows forward, push a tiny piece of cotton wool or dental floss under it to help the nail grow over the skin and not grow into it. Change the cotton wool or dental floss each time the foot is soaked.
- Do not cut the nail but allow it to grow forward until it is clear of the end of the toe. Then cut it straight across and not rounded off at the end.

How to prevent it?

- Cut the nails straight across; do not cut them too short or too low at the sides. The corner of the nail should be visible above the skin. (Tip: it is easier to cut nails after a bath or shower, when they are soft.)
- Keep the feet clean and dry. Let air get to the toes when possible.
- Avoid tight shoes and use cotton socks rather than synthetic.
- If diabetes is present, extra care should be taken when cutting the nails.
- Gently file any sharp edges with a nail file.
- Any loss of feeling in the feet, a Foot Health Professional should be called to trim the nails.