



Thickening Nail

Patient Information

What is it?

Thickening nail which is also known as '*Onychauxis*' is a nail disorder that causes fingernails or toenails to grow abnormally thick. Over time, the nails may become curled and turn white or yellow.

This thickening of the nail may force the nail plate (the part of the nail painted with polish) to separate from the nail bed. Though fungal nail can cause similar symptoms, onychauxis isn't caused by a fungus although the risk of developing a fungal infection does increase with this nail disorder.

What causes it?

Onychauxis may be the result of several conditions or issues. A Foot Health Professional can diagnose what the underlying issue of abnormal nail growth is.

The most common causes for onychauxis include:-

- **Hereditary causes** If one or both parents have this nail condition.
- **Acute trauma** Stubbing the toe or dropping a heavy object on it causing trauma to the nail bed and nail plate. This trauma may cause nail thickening, but may only be temporary until the nail heals.
- **Chronic trauma** Where a good deal of pressure is inflicted on the feet for long periods of time, such as athletes, dancers, or runners. The long-term stress on the nail beds and nail plates may trigger the unusual growth. Wearing shoes that are too tight or too small can also cause this condition.
- **Acromegaly** Too much growth hormone can cause nails to be denser.
- **Psoriasis** This skin condition causes thick patches of scaly skin, and can cause nails to grow thicker and more brittle. More than half of people with skin psoriasis will experience nail psoriasis too.
- **Reduced circulation** Without proper nutrients, nails may be unable to grow properly.
- **Diabetes** People with diabetes develop thick nails. This can be a complication of the disease.
- **Darier disease** A genetic skin disorder, causing wart-like blemishes that may be yellow, emit a strong odour, and be hard to the touch. This condition can also cause nail abnormalities, including white and red stripes in the nail plate and unusual thickness.
- **Infection** A yeast or fungal infection in the nail bed or around the nail plate can cause discoloration and thicker nails.
- **Pityriasis rubra pilaris** A rare skin condition that causes chronic inflammation and reddish-orange scales or blotches on the skin. It can also lead to nail thickening, discoloration, and shedding.

How do I treat it?

To treat the underlying condition or in extreme cases, a Foot Health Professional may choose to remove a portion or all of the thickened nail. This is an option when the nail becomes so thick severe pain is experienced.

Home remedy options:-

- Keep neat trimmed nails.
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Nail polish may help cover the discoloration, but it will not end or stop the abnormal growth.
- Boost circulation in the lower extremities by walking, riding a bicycle, or otherwise moving more. The increase in blood, oxygen, and other nutrients may end the unusual nail growth issue.