

TEMPLATE: Condition Information

Body Part

Toe nails

Condition:

Toenail infections are mainly caused by a fungus or dermatophyte. Feet are an ideal place for fungi to grow as they grow well in warm, moist places. It generally starts as an infection in the skin known as Tinea Pedis or Athletes Foot, and if left untreated the same infection can spread to the nail. It can develop in people at any age, but it's more common in older adults. As the nail ages, it can become brittle and dry resulting in cracks making a portal for the fungus to enter. People who are exposed to walking barefoot in damp areas such as swimming pools or gym showers, are also at risk of developing a fungal infection.

Symptoms:

- Thickening
 - As the infection spreads into the nail matrix (root), it distorts the way it grows out and causes thickness
- Brittleness
 - The nail becomes flakey and loses its tensile strength
- Discolouration
 - Yellow and/or white discolouration is common
- Pressure
 - As the nail thickens it causes pressure and thus pain
- Onychocryptosis (ingrown nail)
 - In some cases if the nail thickens or the nail becomes distorted it can break off easily and cause an ingrown nail.

Treatment:

With fungal nails - prevention is better than cure. Once the infection spreads into the nail it becomes very difficult to extract the infection from the hard nail. Thus a few preventative techniques are:

- Wash your hands and feet regularly.
- Use Tea-tree oil on the nails
- Wear sweat-absorbing socks or change your socks throughout the day.
- Choose shoes made of materials that breathe.
- Discard old shoes or treat them with disinfectants or anti-fungal powders.

- Wear footwear in pool areas and locker rooms.
- Choose a nail salon that uses sterilised manicure tools for each customer.
- Keep nails short.
- Give up nail polish and artificial nails

If the nail seems to be already infected early detection is paramount. Treatments include:

- Topical antifungal if the infection is in its early stages.
- Oral antifungals prescribed by your GP if topical antifungals aren't working.
- For the best outcome use the aforementioned treatments in combination.
- Podiatric nail care.
- Important to note that whilst treating the nail to employ the above preventative techniques simultaneously.

Prognosis:

As mentioned before, fungal nail infections are difficult to treat, if however you detect it early your outcomes are a lot better. It takes approximately 3 months to remove the infection after early detection and anywhere from 3 - 12 months for more extensive infection. The likelihood of the infection never being eradicated is high, however these infections are not detrimental to your health, apart from the mild discomfort the thickening might cause.



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Further information:

For further information, please contact our friendly team at Gen Health.

Picture Link: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/nail-fungus/symptoms-causes/syc-20353294>

