

■ Ingrown Toenails ■

Ingrown toenails are a common and painful problem occurring when the edge of a toenail grows into the skin. Keeping the nails properly trimmed is the best way to prevent ingrown toenails. If severe, simple surgery involving removal of part of the nail can be done to correct the problem.

What are ingrown toenails?

An ingrown toenail happens when the edge of a nail, often on the big toe, grows into the skin at the side of the nail. This can cause redness, swelling, and pain. There may also be infection in the area. Simple prevention and treatment steps are effective.

What do they look like?

- Ingrown toenails cause soreness and redness along the edge of the nail, in the little fold of skin next to the nail. Depending on severity, the area may be quite painful.
- The inside edge of the nail of the big toe is affected most often.
- In some cases, a sore may develop in the skin alongside the nail. If this happens, there is a risk that the area may become infected.
- Pus may be seen draining from the area.
- Redness and tenderness from infection can extend beyond the skin bordering the nail (cellulitis).

What causes ingrown toenails?

- Improper cutting or trimming of nails can cause an ingrown toenail. Toenails should be cut straight across—not in a curve—so that the nail edges grow past the fold of skin alongside the nail.
- Tight-fitting shoes that put pressure on the toes can increase the risk of ingrown nails.

What are some possible complications of ingrown toenails?

- Infection may occur in the inflamed skin around the ingrown toenail.
- Ingrown toenails are a commonly recurrent problem.

Can ingrown toenails be prevented?

To prevent ingrown toenails or to keep them from coming back:

- Wear properly fitted shoes; avoid shoes with high heels or pointed toes.
- Keep nails properly trimmed—cut straight across, not in a curve. Don't tear or pick at the nails, especially at the corners.

How are ingrown toenails treated?

If the problem is not too severe, you may be able to treat it at home:

- Soak the foot in warm water a few times a day to soften the skin.
- Place a small piece of cotton under the edge of the nail.
- Leave the cotton in place until the nail grows out over the skin fold.
- Once the nail has grown out, keep the nails properly trimmed to prevent the problem from coming back.
- If infection is suspected, antibiotics will be prescribed.

If home treatment doesn't work or if pain and tenderness are getting worse, the doctor may recommend a minor operation to correct the problem:

- The area is numbed with a local anesthetic during the procedure, and the surgeon removes the part of the nail that is growing into the skin.
- In some situations, the entire nail is removed.
- Follow the surgeon's instructions for care of the area after surgery.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- Pain and swelling of ingrown toenail continue or get worse despite home treatment or if the problem recurs after treatment.
- Signs of infection develop (increasing redness and tenderness, sometimes with an oozing or crusting wound).