



Ingrown Toenails

Ingrown toenails are due to the penetration of the edges of the nail plate into the soft tissue of the toe. It begins with a painful irritation that often becomes infected. With bacterial invasion, the nail margin becomes red and swollen, sometimes with drainage or pus. In people who have diabetes or poor circulation, this relatively minor problem can become quite severe. In this instance a simple ingrown toenail can result in gangrene of the toe. Patients with joint replacements or pacemakers are at risk of bacterial spread through the bloodstream resulting in the spread of infection to these sites. These patients should seek medical attention at the earliest sign of an ingrown toenail. Once an ingrown toenail starts, they will often reoccur. Many people perform "bathroom" surgery to cut the nail margin out only to have it reoccur months later as the nail grows out.

Treatment of Ingrown Toenails

An ingrown nail should be treated as soon as it develops. Sterile instruments to remove the infected or painful nail border is recommended. If an ingrown nail recurs, it may require a more permanent solution. A small portion of the nail and nail matrix (part of the nail that actually grows, is removed with a concentrated chemical solution. This helps prevent the ingrown from growing back.

Fungal Toenails, Yellowed or Deformed Toenails

The most common cause of yellowed, thick and/or deformed toenails is a fungal infection of the toenail. The fungus that infects the nail, most commonly, is the same fungus that causes athlete's foot. It tends to be slowly progressive, damaging the nail to a greater and greater over time. The infection usually starts at the tip of the nail and works its way back. It usually is not painful and often noticed until it is well established. A single toenail or any number of nails can be affected. It can also occur on just one foot. Over time, the nail becomes thickened, crumbly, and distorted in appearance. It usually appears at the nail edge and works its way under the nail, progressing back to the root of the toenail. Once the fungus begins to invade the root, it begins to distort the way the nail grows. The fungus prefers an environment that is moist, dark and warm, which is why it affects the toenails much more often than fingernails.

Diagnosis

Not all thickened or yellowed toenails are caused by fungal infection. Injury to a toenail can cause the toenail to grow in a thickened or malformed fashion. This can be due to an established fungal infection or may be due to the damage caused to the nail root when it was injured. Other causes of thickened toenails are small bone spurs that can form under the toenail and psoriasis.

Treatment of Fungal Toenails

It is best to treat the nail condition as soon as it is noticed. There are effective topical and oral medications available for the treatment of fungal toe.

