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SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON INGROWING TOENAILS

An ingrown toenail is the name given to a toenail that has grown into the skin at the side of the toe. The toenail curls and pierces the skin, which may become red, swollen, and sore. Bacteria may infect the skin, making it more swollen and painful, with white or yellow liquid (pus) coming from the affected area. Anyone can develop an ingrown toenail. Usually the big toenail is affected, but it can happen to other toenails. Ingrown toenails may be caused by:

- cutting your toenails too short, cutting the edges of the nail, or tearing the nail off
- wearing tight-fitting shoes, socks, or tights
- having toenails with naturally curved sides
- sweaty feet – because the skin around the nail will be softer
- injury, such as stubbing your toe
- genetic factors including your posture, your gait (the way you walk) and any foot deformity such as a bunion, hammer toes or excessive pronation of the feet (when your foot rolls inward excessively).
- fungal infection

Is it serious?

Not usually, unless you have an existing condition such as diabetes, poor circulation, or a reduced immune system. However, if left untreated, infection can develop in the rest of the toe and foot, and in very rare cases get into the blood stream. The quicker you deal with it, the less painful the treatment.

How can I treat ingrown toenails?

Without treatment, an ingrown toenail may get infected. With an infection, the affected skin will be hot, red, swollen, and painful, and you may see pus. You may also have a temperature. If you think the skin around your nail is infected, see your doctor.

If you don't think your skin is infected, and only a small part of your toenail is cutting into the skin, you can try following these steps:

1. Soak your toe in salt water or Potassium Permanganate solution for 10 minutes to soften the skin around the toenail.
2. Use a cotton wool bud to gently push the skin around the toenail down and away from the nail. Start at the root of the toenail and work upwards.

3. Push a tiny piece of cotton wool or dental floss under the end of the toenail. As the nail grows forwards, this will help it to grow over the skin and not into the skin.
4. Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3 every day for a few weeks. Change the cotton wool or dental floss every day, each time you soak your toe.
5. When the nail has grown past the end of your toe, cut it straight across. Don't cut the edges of the nail to make it curved.

What else can help?

Take one or two 500mg paracetamol tablets up to 4 times a day to help with the pain.

Do I need to see my podiatrist or doctor?

See your doctor if:

- you have diabetes
- the skin around your nail is infected. With an infection, your skin will be hot, red, swollen, and painful, and you may see pus. You may also have a temperature.
- you've treated your toenail for 7 days (see treatment section), but it isn't better, or it's getting worse
- you also have a fungal nail infection (toenail turns white, black, yellow or green, is thicker or has an unusual shape; it may also be more brittle, and bits of nail may break off).

You can self-refer to podiatry at the following website:

<https://www.ghc.nhs.uk/self-refer/podiatry-self-referral-form/>

How can I stop an ingrown toenail developing?

- Wear shoes, tights and socks that give your toes enough space to move.
- Wash your feet every day with soap and water to keep them clean.
- Cut your toenails straight across. Toenails that curve at the top are more likely to dig into the skin around your nail. Use a nail file on any sharp edges.

Toenail removal

For those particularly prone to ingrowing toenails from underlying problems, a partial nail avulsion may be recommended. This procedure is done under a local anaesthetic where part of the nail is removed leaving a permanently narrower nail. In some cases, a total nail avulsion may be performed, where the entire nail plate and root are removed. In either case, the chemical phenol is used to treat the nail and prevent it regrowing. This is over 95% successful. You will, however, have to do a number of re-dressings either at home or with your podiatrist.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/
- Self-refer to podiatry: <https://www.ghc.nhs.uk/self-refer/podiatry-self-referral-form/>

If you have further questions:

Call the ***practice*** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require ***urgent*** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an ***emergency*** call ***999***