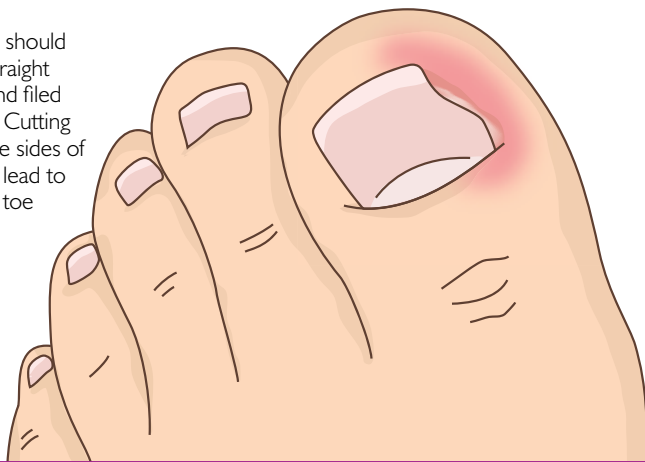


INGROWN TOE NAIL

Toe nails should be cut straight across and filed smooth. Cutting down the sides of nails can lead to ingrown toe nails.



WHAT IS IT?

An ingrown toe nail (onychocryptosis) is where the nail curls over and cuts into the skin at the side of the nail. This can cause the area to become very sore and inflamed. Often patients complain of pain as the nail curls and pushes on, but does not break through the skin. This is known as involution. Ingrown toe nails

most often affect adolescent males and are seen on the big toes. They are caused by incorrect nail cutting or picking the nails which leaves a spike at the side, inappropriately tight shoes, excessively sweaty feet making the skin soft and easy to pierce or an injury like stubbing the toe.

DIAGNOSIS

An ingrown nail is easy to spot. You will find the area very painful to touch and it will be red and inflamed. Often, with gentle examination, your podiatrist might be able to see where a spike of

nail is penetrating the skin. There might also be an infection present which will cause excessive pain, some pus or exudate and the area is likely to feel hot to the touch.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

How an ingrown toe nail is treated totally depends on the severity of the case. If the nail has just broken the skin a little then often your podiatrist will be able to use some fine edged nippers to cut the spike away. They will then be able to apply a small dressing. If the nail is cut correctly from then on, it shouldn't cause any problems. Sometimes however, due to the shape of the nail, it will always grow back into the skin. If the nail is too painful or deep to remove using nippers then nail surgery might be an option. The surgical procedure your podiatrist will carry out is called a partial or total

nail avulsion, depending how much of the nail is removed. The affected toe will be injected with local anaesthetic and once the nail or section of nail is removed, the surgeon will apply an acid called phenol to the area where the nail grows to prevent regrowth. This procedure is around 98% effective so nail regrowth is a risk but is rare if the acid is applied properly. For a few days after the surgery your toe will be a little sore and you may need to take some painkillers. You will also have a dressing in place which will be a little bulky for the first 24 hours until it is replaced with a smaller dressing.

Continued overleaf



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TREATMENT OPTIONS CONTINUED

If you have a total nail avulsion, the skin under the nail will harden and if you have a partial removal, the nail will be roughly 5mm narrower and the skin around the nail will grow up to the new nail edge. The prognosis for this procedure is very good with very few complications.

To prevent an ingrown toe nail, you should not pick at your toe nails. It is important to cut the nails straight across and do not cut down the sides. If you are unsure then you should seek advice as nail shapes can differ from person to person. If you practice good foot hygiene and make sure the nails

and skin around them do not become moist with sweat, you are less likely to suffer with an ingrown nail. Additionally, wearing footwear that is wide enough not to put pressure on the toes or wearing an ingrowing toenail protector will also help you to avoid a problem. If you have concerns or think you might be suffering with the beginnings of an ingrown nail, see a podiatrist as soon as possible. The longer you leave it, the more complicated the problem can become.

GENERAL FOOTCARE ADVICE

REGULAR WASHING

Feet should be washed daily in warm water and then dried gently with a soft towel. A sprinkling of soothing foot powder is helpful, especially between the toes.

VALUE OF MASSAGE

Massage will help tone up circulation and relax the muscles. Try contrast bathing by alternatively dipping the feet first in comfortably hot water for one minute and then cold water for twenty seconds for a total of ten minutes. Always finish with the cold dip.

CUT TOE NAILS REGULARLY

Keep toe nails trimmed to just over the tip of the toe and cut them straight across. Never cut around the corners as this may lead to ingrowing toe nails. Cut them at least once per month.



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