

INGROWN TOENAILS

Description

Ingrown toenails are one of the most common causes of foot pain. While they are most common in people that are in their twenties and thirties, anyone can fall victim. When a toenail is ingrown, the sides or corners curl down and dig into the skin. As the nail continues to grow, the toe treats the offending nails like a foreign body, a splinter or a piece of glass. As a result, pain, swelling and redness occurs. If left untreated an infection may follow, leading to the development of pus under the nail and possibly a bone infection.

The most common place for an ingrown toenail is the big toe and the number one cause is improper cutting. Nails that are trimmed down into the corner or peeled off at the edge are likely to become ingrown. Other causes include injury to the toe. People who go barefoot and stub a toe often wind up with ingrown toenails, as may those who drop something heavy on their toe. Tight fitting shoes, which encourage nails to curl in, and a condition called hyperhidrosis, or excessive sweating of the feet, can also cause ingrown toenails.

Treatments

A toenail that is just starting to ingrow or that is not deeply ingrown can be relieved at home. Soak the foot in warm water to soften the nail and then place dry cotton, such as part of a cotton ball, under the corner of the nail. The cotton elevates the nail from the skin and will redirect the nail to grow out properly.

If the condition doesn't respond, it's time to visit the podiatrist's office. More than likely there is a splinter of nail embedded in the side of the toe. Or the nail may be ingrown along the entire side, not just at the tip. With a skilled hand and the right instruments, most ingrown nails can be removed in minutes with little or no pain.

In more severe cases or with recurring ingrown toenails, there is an option for permanent correction. This involves removing the portion of the nail that is ingrown and applying a chemical to the root to prevent it from regrowing. The procedure is painless and takes only minutes in the podiatrist's office under local anesthesia. Patients are able to walk immediately and return to work the same day.

TIPS FOR PREVENTING INGROWN TOENAILS:

- Cut toenails straight across
- Don't cut nails too short
- Don't pick your nails or tear at the corners
- Wear shoes with plenty of toe room
- Avoid wearing tight socks or pantyhose