



Find out more

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Ingrowing toenails

Information for patients

Introduction

An ingrown toenail develops when the sides of the toenail grow into the surrounding skin.

The big toe is often affected, either on one or both sides. The nail curls and pierces the skin, which becomes red, swollen and tender.

Other possible symptoms include:

- pain if pressure is placed on the toe
- inflammation of the skin at the end of the toe
- a build-up of fluid in the area surrounding the toe
- an overgrowth of skin around the affected toe
- bleeding
- white or yellow pus coming from the affected area

Causes

A number of things can cause an ingrown toenail to develop, including:

- **badly cut toenails** – cutting your toenails too short, or cutting the edges, will encourage the skin to fold over your nail and the nail to grow into the skin
 - **wearing tight-fitting shoes, socks or tights** – this places pressure on the skin around your toenail; the skin may be pierced if it's pressed on to your toenail
 - **sweaty feet** – if the skin around your toenails is soft, it's easier for your nail to pierce it and embed itself within it
 - **injury** – for example, stubbing your toe can sometimes cause an ingrown toenail to develop
 - **natural shape of the nail** – the sides of curved or fan-shaped toenails are more likely to press into the skin surrounding the nail
- Fungal nail infection can cause your toenail to thicken or widen.

Treatment

Left untreated, an ingrown toenail can become infected, so it's important that you:

- keep your feet clean by washing them regularly with soap and water
- use socks made of natural fibres and change them regularly
- Using proper nail clippers, cut your nails straight across, not too short, and file any sharp corners down with an emery board.

Do not cut down the sides of the nail. It may relieve the pain for a short while but can cause further more painful problems.



- wear comfortable shoes that fit properly. Shoes that are tight and pinch around the toes such as, court shoes, can irritate painful toenails and can in some cases be the cause of them becoming ingrown.

Surgery may be recommended if your toenail doesn't improve. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, this may involve removing part or all of your toenail.

The procedure can usually be done locally by a Podiatrist and you can walk straight away, but rest is advised as this aids healing. Full details can be obtained from your Podiatrist.

See your GP or podiatrist (foot care specialist) if your ingrown toenail is badly inflamed, bleeding or has pus coming from it, because it may be infected.