

Ingrown Toenails

Information for patients



Podiatry Department

What is an ingrown toenail?

When a piece of toenail punctures the skin causing a wound, it is known as an ingrown toenail.

Signs and symptoms

The toe may be painful. It may appear red and swollen around the toenail. There may be bleeding. Sometimes it can become infected and so you may notice pus or a bad smell coming from the wound.

What causes ingrown toenails?

There are lots of reasons why you might have an ingrown toenail. Some common examples include:

- Picking at the sides of the nail or at the skin around the nail
- Cutting the nail too short
- Not cutting your nail straight across
- Trauma from sport, an accidental injury or badly fitting shoes

What to do if you have an ingrown toenail

You should self-refer to the Podiatry Department if you think you have an ingrown toenail. The details on the back of this leaflet explain how to do this.

The following steps will help you to keep the wound clean until your appointment with the Podiatry Department:

1. Wash your hands using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
2. Prepare a clean basin with warm water and add 2 tablespoons of salt. Submerge the foot for five minutes
3. After five minutes remove your foot from the water and leave it to air dry
4. Once dry cover the toe with a clean dressing or plaster. These are available from your local chemist or supermarket. Your

pharmacist will be able to help you select an alternative dressing if you experience allergies to plasters.

Every 2 days, remove the dressing and repeat steps 1 – 4. You might need to do this more often if you see fluid coming through the dressing.

What will happen at my Podiatry appointment?

A Podiatrist will ask you questions and assess the toe and nail. They will gently remove any spikes of nail that are puncturing the skin. This often provides quick relief of pain. You might be offered a local anaesthetic to numb the toe, but it is usually not needed.

They will clean and dress the toe with sterile dressing. If antibiotics are needed for an infection this will be arranged.

You may be offered nail surgery under local anaesthetic to remove the entire nail or a piece of it. If the Podiatrist feels this is necessary, they will discuss the procedure and agree a plan for this. You will be able to discuss any questions or concerns you may have before being added to the waiting list.

Preventing ingrown toenails

You should only cut or file your toenails straight across. Avoid cutting them too short. They should meet the end of the toe.

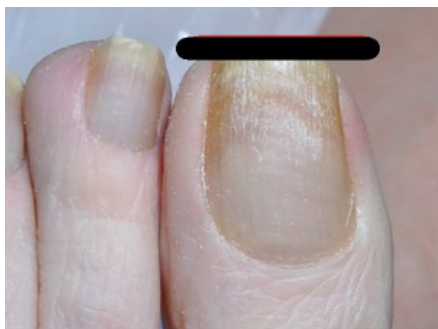


Image: correct length and shape of toenail

Avoid picking your nails and skin. This habit is common amongst people with conditions such as ADHD, Autism and OCD and is sometimes a response to stress. It can be difficult to prevent nail picking but keeping the area covered with socks can help and using stress balls or other distractions may be useful.

Make sure your shoes fit well. There should be half an inch of space between the tip of your longest toe and the end of your shoe. The shoe should be deep enough so that it doesn't press on the tops of your toes.

How to get help from a podiatrist

To refer yourself to NHS Lothian Podiatry Department you can either ask for a self-referral form from your GP reception or download one from our website:

<https://weare.nhslothian.scot/podiatry/access-to-the-service/>

It's important to give as much information as you can when completing this form. This will help us to prioritise you. If you are housebound, please ask your GP to refer you urgently.

Private Podiatrists can also help you with this problem. If you decide to seek help from private Podiatrists you can make sure they are registered with Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC). Check the register at: www.hcpc-uk.org

Podiatry Department – 0131 536 1627

Patients who are housebound, reside in a nursing home or hospital ward – 0131 446 4631

If you notice redness moving from the toe towards the top of the foot or leg, are feeling sick, shaking or have a high temperature these may be signs of sepsis. You should contact NHS 24 for urgent advice by dialling 111.