

FUNGAL NAILS

HAVE I GOT A FUNGAL NAIL INFECTION?

Sending a clipping of your nail to a laboratory for analysis is the only sure way to confirm the presence of a fungal infection. However, there are a few tell-tale signs that your podiatrist will recognise, and they can advise you accordingly.

A nail that has a fungal infection usually appears thickened, discoloured (typically white, yellow or brown), and is often crumbly and deformed. Sometimes a nail has just grown thicker due to damage to the nail bed, either through direct injury or from repetitive micro-trauma from ill-fitting shoes, for example. There is no infection present and these nails can simply be filed down.

HOW DID I GET IT?

Fungal nail infections are very common. If you have Athlete's Foot, which is a fungal infection of the skin, it is possible that the microbes have migrated to within your nail. If only one nail is affected, and there is no history of fungal infection elsewhere, it is possible that previous nail damage has allowed the invasion of fungal spores to develop under the nail where they've grown and multiplied.

People with various health complaints, such as diabetes, or those who have reduced immunity through age, poor general health, or medication may be at increased risk.

HOW DO I GET RID OF IT?

Once a fungal infection becomes established in the toenails it is very difficult to get rid of it. Despite advertising claims, topical treatments are rarely effective on their own, and usually require combining with oral medication. However, the tablets, which can only be prescribed from your GP, can have side effects and are not recommended for certain patients. In the majority of cases, a fungal nail infection is harmless and asymptomatic.

If you are concerned about the cosmetic appearance of the nail your podiatrist can use a drill to reduce the thickness and improve the shape of the nail - this can then be painted if required. Self-treatment will involve regular filing of the nail to slow any deformed growth. Treat any infected nails last to avoid spreading the spores to other, healthy nails.

In rare cases, for those who have poor immune systems or where the nail is causing pain, for example, the whole nail may be removed under local anaesthetic.

HOW DO I AVOID PASSING IT ON?

If you have an infection then it may be passed on to others. Always wear flip-flops if you're in communal changing rooms, and avoid sharing towels or nail clippers.

At home ask others in your family to adopt good hygiene practices and to be on the lookout for signs of Athlete's Foot, which may act as a route for subsequent nail infection, but is much more easily treated.

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.

Patient Booking Line: 0203 633 3554 (local)

Can we improve our service to you?

Please visit www.healthshare.org.uk and
click **Patient Survey**
or email us at enquiry@healthshare.org.uk