

# Ingrown Toenail: Care Instructions



## Overview

An ingrown toenail is a toenail that has grown into the skin instead of over it. This usually happens to the big toe, but it can also happen to other toes. It often occurs because a nail is not trimmed correctly or because shoes are too tight.

Most ingrown toenails can be treated at home. But an ingrown nail can cause an infection. If your toe is infected, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

Good nail care can help prevent ingrown toenails.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

- Trim the nails straight across. Leave the corners a little longer so they do not cut into the skin. To do this when you have an ingrown nail:
  - Soak your foot in warm water for about 15 minutes to soften the nail.
  - Wedge a small piece of wet cotton under the corner of the nail to cushion the nail and lift it slightly. This keeps it from cutting the skin.
  - Repeat daily until the nail has grown out and can be trimmed.
- Do not trim your toenails too short.
- Wear comfortable shoes that are roomy in the toe area.
- Soak your foot in warm, soapy water for 10 to 20 minutes a few times each day.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.
- Check with your doctor before trimming your own toenails if you have been diagnosed with diabetes or peripheral arterial disease. These conditions increase the risk of an infection because you may have decreased sensation in your toes and cut yourself without knowing it.

## When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks leading from the toe.
  - Pus draining from the toe.
  - A fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

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