



Patient Education: Ingrown Toenails-Care & Prevention

Q: What is an ingrown toenail?

A: • This is when the sides or corners of the toenail curl down and dig into the skin of the toe, causing swelling, pain, and redness of side of the toe. Any toe can be affected, but the big toe is most common.

Q: What causes an ingrown toenail?

- A:** There are many causes of ingrown toenails.
- They can be caused by shoes that are too tight in the toe area. Pressure from a poor fitting shoe causes the toenail to grow abnormally.
 - Ingrown toenails can result from poorly shaped toenails. See below.
 - Some medical conditions, such as fungal infections or arthritis, can cause toenails to thicken and grow abnormally.
 - Ingrown toenails can result from injury to the toe.



Figure 1: Ingrown toenail

If not treated, ingrown toenails can become infected. Infections are problems for people with diabetes, poor circulation, or other medical conditions.

Q: What is the treatment for a painful ingrown toenail?

- A:**
- There are many home cures that some people say help, although there is no proof that they help every patient. Home cures include:
 - Soaking your foot in warm water for 15 to 20 minutes and placing a small piece of dry cotton, such as part of a cotton ball, under the corner of the nail.
 - Your doctor may suggest an antibiotic pill or ointment if there are signs of infection.
 - Minor surgery is sometimes needed to remove the part (or all) of the nail that is poking into the skin. If surgery is needed your doctor will:
 - First numb your toe by injecting it with an anesthetic
 - Then cut your toenail along the edge that is growing into the skin and pull out the piece of nail.
 - Finally, in some cases, your doctor may apply a liquid to the nail bed which will keep the toenail from growing back.
 - After surgery to care for your toe, follow directions from the doctor which usually include:
 - Keep a bandage over the toe until changed by the primary care team in 48-72 hours.
 - Take Tylenol® or ibuprofen as needed for pain.
 - It may help to rest and raise your foot for 2-3 days.
 - After the first bandage change you can usually wash the toe in warm water and apply antibiotic once or twice a day until it heals.
 - Avoid running or hard activity for the first 2 weeks.
 - Call your team if you have any increasing pain, swelling, redness, or drainage.

Q: Can Ingrown Toenails be prevented?

- A:** • Yes, avoid tight-fitting shoes and trim your nails correctly.
- You should cut your nails generally straight across (not curved) and do not cut too short.

