

Patient Handout: Ingrown Toenails

WHAT IS AN INGROWN TOENAIL?

An ingrown toenail occurs when the corner or side of the nail grows down into the skin and flesh of your toe. This causes pain, redness and swelling. Rough or red skin may grow over the area.

This is a common problem that occurs most often in the big toe, but it can occur on any toe.



WHAT CAUSES INGROWN TOENAILS?

- Cutting your toenails the wrong way (too short or with rounded edges).
- Tearing, pulling or picking toenails.
- Wearing shoes that are too tight around your toes.
- Wearing sweaty socks for long periods of time.
- Repeated injury from activities such as running or kicking a soccer ball.
- Some conditions can increase the chances of getting an ingrown toenail. E.g. diabetes, obesity, thyroid, heart or kidney conditions.

HOW CAN I PREVENT AN INGROWN TOENAIL?

- **Cut your toenails straight across, leaving the corners square.**
- **Do not pick or tear off toenails.**
- Keep your feet clean and dry.
- Keep feet open to air as often as possible.
- Change your socks often if your feet get sweaty.
- **Do not wear tight fitting shoes or high heels.** Make sure your footwear is roomy and comfortable.

HOW SHOULD I CUT MY TOENAILS?



✓ The right way	✗ The wrong way
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight across the top • Even with the top of the toe 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rounded corners • Too short

Image source: Hamilton Health Sciences

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HOW CAN I TREAT MY INGROWN TOENAIL ?

- Clean the area 2 or 3 times each day. Soak your foot in warm water for about 5 minutes.
- Use a cotton-tipped swab to gently push back the nailbed. Rinse and dry your foot.
- **Train the nail to grow out. Use any of these methods:**

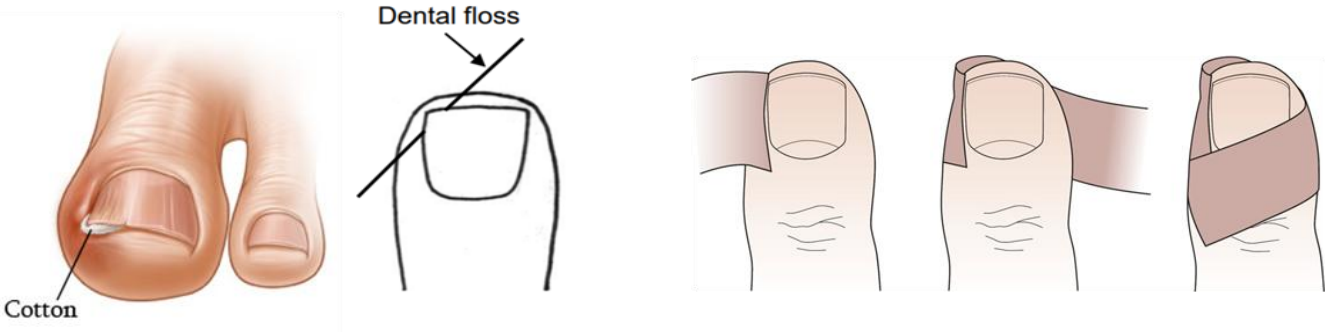


Image sources: Hamilton Health Sciences, Alberta MyHealth, Best Practice Journal New Zealand

WET COTTON / DENTAL FLOSS:
After soaking foot in warm water for 5-15 minutes, **wedge a small piece of wet cotton or dental floss under the corner of the ingrown nail.**
Replace the wet cotton / dental floss **at least once a day**, or if it falls out/ becomes dirty, **for at least two months.**

TAPING:
Using an **adhesive elastic medical tape** (about 15 – 20 mm wide and 5 cm long), stick one end of the tape over the **fleshy area with the ingrown nail.** Then **wrap the tape around the toe** so that the other end overlaps the first **without covering the toenail.**
Re-tape the toe **every 3 to 7 days** (or whenever the tape becomes loose) **for at least two months.**

Ingrown nails take about two months to grow out!

Keep using the above methods until the nail has grown out or can be trimmed.

- Try to wear open-toe shoes, such as sandals, that do not rub the toenail.
- Try to keep your foot open to air. Avoid socks.
- Do not use manicure scissors to dig under the ingrown nail. You might stab your toe, which could get infected.
- As your toenail grows, it should no longer cut into your skin.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR?

- **If you think your toenail has become infected** (increased pain, swelling or drainage). If you have a severe infection, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.
- **If the above methods are not working or the ingrown nail keeps coming back.** The doctor may have to remove part or all of the toenail. For severe problems the root of the nail may need to be removed.

IF YOU GET OFFICE SURGERY FOR INGROWN TOENAIL: After-Care Instructions

- Soak your foot in warm water each day.
- Keep a bandage over the site until it heals.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) as needed for pain.
- Keep the wound clean and dry; you may shower the day after surgery.
- Wear loose fitting shoes or open-toe shoes for the first 2 weeks.
- Avoid running or strenuous activity for the first 2 weeks.
- Call your doctor if the toe is not healing.