

DESCRIPTION

A common problem in which one or both edges of a nail grow into the flesh of a toe, usually the great (big) toe. This can lead to infection and inflammation (red and sore).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Pain, tenderness, redness, swelling and heat in the toe where the sharp nail-edge pierces the nearby fold of tissue. Once tissue around the nail becomes red and sore, infection often develops.

CAUSES

An ingrown toenail is likely to occur with one of the following conditions:

- The nail is more curved than normal.
- The toenail is clipped back too far, allowing tissue to grow up over it.
- Injury to the nail, or infection of the nail.
- Shoes fit poorly, forcing the toe of the shoe against the nail and surrounding tissue.
- Sports activities that require sudden stops (“toe jamming”)

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear roomy, well-fitting shoes and socks.
- Keep feet clean and dry.
- If you handle heavy objects at work wear steel toe shoes.
- Cut toenails straight across, not too short.
- Avoid foot injury especially if you have diabetes mellitus or blood vessel disease which causes poor healing.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Curable with treatment. Possible complications may include minor surgery to remove the part of the nail that is poking into the skin.

GENERAL MEASURES

Soak the toe for 20 minutes twice a day in a gallon of warm water. You may add either 2 tablespoons of Epsom salts, or 2 tablespoons of a mild detergent. Lift the nail corners gently, and wedge a very small piece of cotton under the ingrown nail edges. This will lift the nail slightly so it can grow past the skin tissue it is digging into. Replace the cotton daily.

MEDICATIONS

- Apply antibiotic ointment (like Bacitracin) to the site at least twice a day.
- An oral antibiotic may be necessary if infection develops.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medications. These medications may offer significant symptom relief:

- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for discomfort.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- You develop a fever.
- You develop increased pain.
- Red streaks going up foot or ankle.
- You develop signs of infection (pain, redness, heat swelling tenderness).