

Ingrowing toenail advice sheet with footwear

What is an ingrowing toenail?

An ingrowing toenail is where a piece of nail pierces the flesh of the toe. It can feel as if you have a splinter and be extremely painful. It can become inflamed or infected and in more severe cases, it can cause pus and bleeding. Ingrowing toenails commonly affect the big toe but can affect other toes too. A nail that is curling into the flesh, but isn't piercing the skin, isn't an ingrowing toenail but can feel very painful and can also appear red and inflamed.



Do I need antibiotics?

Antibiotics are only required if infection is present. Often pain, swelling and redness are due to inflammation. Antibiotics do not speed up healing. Taking paracetamol and bathing in salt water, as per guidance below can ease pain.

What are the causes of ingrowing toenails?

- Poor nail cutting
- Tight or narrow footwear
- Tight hosiery or socks
- Excessive sweating
- Fungal nail infection
- Repetitive microtrauma i.e. some sports such as football, ballet, running etc.
- Nail deformity & nail shape
- Foot posture when standing or walking
- Foot deformities such as a bunions, hammer toes
- A side effect of the medication isotretinoin



What are the treatments?

There are two options, conservative and surgical management. If you have not previously suffered with an ingrowing toenail, it is likely to settle down, but it will take

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time. If it is a reoccurring problem, not improving, or requiring multiple courses of antibiotics then nail surgery under local anaesthetic may be recommended.

Conservative treatment:

- You can relieve discomfort by bathing your foot in a salt water, this helps to prevent infection and reduces inflammation.
- Avoid tight fitting shoes which will increase pressure and pain.
- Follow good nail cutting techniques, avoid cutting nails too short or cutting down nail edges
- You may choose regular private treatment with a HCPC podiatrist to relieve pressure from the nail

Surgical treatment:

- The affected toe is injected with local anaesthetic, once the toe is numb, either the nail or a section of nail is removed. Often a chemical (Phenol) is used to prevent regrowth
- As with any surgical procedure there are side effects which need to be considered, but this can offer a permanent solution
- Onward referral to the local NHS podiatry team can be organised at your surgery
- Alternatively, you may wish to consider nail surgery with a private HCPC podiatrist

Salt foot baths for ingrowing toenails

A high concentration of salt is required approximately 1 Teaspoon per pint of water used.

1. Pour a kettle of boiled water into a clean bowl and add salt
2. Let the water cool and salt dissolve
3. Test water is not too hot before bathing
4. Bathe foot in cooled salt water for 3-4 minutes
5. Place foot on clean towel and allow to dry naturally
6. If the toe is weeping apply a dressing such as Mepore (6x7cm) to prevent bacteria infecting the wound

Try to keep your toe dry when showering or bathing, this avoids making skin too soft around the nail and washing bacteria into an open area. Devices such as Limbos or SealTights can be useful.

Taking paracetamol can help manage pain. Follow recommended dosages.

Monitor for signs of infection, if you notice redness spreading up the toe, flu-like symptoms, fever, chills or increasing pain then contact your GP surgery.

***Patients with diabetes, poor circulation, immunosuppression or taking immunosuppressing medication should monitor closely and contact the surgery immediately if any worsening**

Footwear - helping you make the right choices

Right Shoe, Right Foot, Right Job

There is no right shoe or place to buy them. Get to know your feet and what works for you and the different activities you do.

Poorly fitting footwear can cause foot problems, for example:

- Callus and Corns
- Blisters
- Hammer toes and Bunions
- Sprains
- Ingrowing nails
- Ulceration
- Delayed healing

Do your shoes fit your foot?

- Draw around your feet upon paper (compare both as they are often different shapes and sizes)
- Cut the shape out and see if they fit in shoes without crumpling the edges
- The paper template should fit neatly and easily
- Shoes are considered well fitted if you can move your toes freely without them being squashed.
- Feet do change over time, revisit your size and style periodically
- Shoes are made in different sole shapes ('called lasts'). Does the shape suit your foot? Does the widest part of your foot fit on the widest part of the shoe? What about the depth at the toe?

Help in choosing footwear

A correctly fitted shoe allows the foot to function without any restriction on movement. This prevents discomfort and damage to the foot. Footwear needs to be:

- long, wide and deep enough for your feet.
- Pointed or tapered footwear can restrict foot movement and cause discomfort.
- Buy shoes at the end of the day as feet swell and become bigger.
- Your two feet may be differently sized. Fit to the largest.

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- It is important that your footwear has a secure fastening such as laces, buckles or Velcro. They hold your foot in the shoe and prevent the foot sliding forward and cramping the toes.
- Shoes must feel comfortable when you try them on
- Shoes should be flexible and deep/high enough at the front to allow normal movement at the toes
- Avoid loose shoes.
- Try standing and walking around barefooted. Look at your feet, they will spread and appear differently compared with how they look when you are non-weight bearing.

What should I avoid?

A “slip on”, court shoe or sandal/slider which is kept on the foot by curling the toes. Slip-on shoes are usually narrow, have to be wedged on to stay on the foot and this can damage the toes or cause corns and callus.

A pointed toe box, will squash your toes together and can cause bony deformity. A heel that is too high will cause the foot to be pushed to the end of the shoe, crushing the toes. A shoe made of plastic, which will cause your foot to sweat. A thin, hard sole, will not cushion your foot adequately.

Sources of information

For more information please visit:

- the Healthy Footwear Guide - www.healthy-footwear-guide.com
- [The Royal College of Podiatry](http://www.rcpod.org.uk) for more information on ingrowing toenails and treatment options
- NHS Advice <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ingrown-toenail/>

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

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After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Patient information

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Enter names and Job titles

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