

Ingrown Toenails

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What is an ingrown toenail?

Typically toenails grow straight, but an ingrown toenail develops when the one or both ends of the toenail's corner grow into the skin. An ingrown toenail can be a chronic condition or a one-time occurrence.

What causes ingrown toenails?

Typical causes of ingrown toenails are trimming the toenail, especially the nail corners too short. In addition, heredity, arthritis, shoe pressure, crowding of toes and repeated trauma to the feet also cause ingrown toenails.

The importance of seeking professional help

An ingrown toenail needs immediate attention because it can develop into a serious infection. The ingrown portion of the toenail actually grows into the skin and under the flesh, which creates a ripe environment for bacteria to enter the body. Diabetics and people who have vascular disease and other circulatory disorders must see professional help immediately for an ingrown toenail. The risk of bacterial infection can be extremely dangerous to these persons and lead to more serious health problems.

What are the symptoms of an ingrown toenail?

Symptoms of a bacterial infection include increased pain, swelling, redness, tenderness or heat, excessive inflammation, discharge of pus, and a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher with no other cause. If you notice these symptoms, call your doctor immediately. Do not try to treat or remove part of an infected ingrown toenail yourself.

Treatment for an ingrown toenail without infection

If the ingrown toenail is not infected it usually can be treated at home by soaking the feet in warm salt water, drying them thoroughly with a clean towel, applying an antibacterial ointment to the area, and then bandaging the toe.

Preventing ingrown toenails

While some people do suffer chronic episodes of ingrown toenails, other people can prevent reoccurrences through some simple precautions. Use a toenail clipper when cutting the toenail and clip the nail straight across so the nail corner is visible. Cutting the nail corners too short may allow the nail corner to grow into the skin, rather than over the toe. Also, refrain from wearing tight-fitting socks and shoes. This allows air to better circulate throughout the foot and helps prevent the moist environment that can lead to ingrown toenails. If you have chronic reoccurrences of ingrown toenails, your podiatrist may recommend permanently removing the toenail.

Consult your podiatrist if you have additional questions about treating or preventing ingrown toenails, or check out the American Podiatric Medical Association's web site at apma.org.

Disclaimer: This information is not a substitute for medical advice. All content is for general informational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

For more information, call Dr. Greenblott: (978) 556-9700.

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