

Ingrown Toenail (Onychocryptosis)

What's the problem?

An **ingrown nail** occurs when a portion of a toenail on either side of the toe curls in and presses into the skin. Nails normally are nearly flat, with just a slight curling at the borders. When the border of the nail is curled in too much it injures the surrounding skin.



How does it feel?

You may feel pressure and eventually pain, as the hard and sharp nail edge digs into your skin. Shoes that apply pressure to the toe increase the pain. If an infection develops, there will often be increased pain, redness, and drainage.

How did this happen?

- The most common cause of ingrown nails is cutting the nails improperly. You should always cut your nails straight across. When people cut down the corners of the nail it can lead to the toe nail curling too much and becoming ingrown.
- Another cause is wearing narrow or pointed shoes. This can apply enough pressure to a normal nail to cause it to curl into the skin.

How is it diagnosed?

An ingrown toe nail is diagnosed by your doctor's physical exam. Your doctor will be able to see if the toe nail is curling into your skin too much causing pain or infection to the area.

How can I care for myself?

In mild cases with no infection, you can apply a standard moisturizing cream to the nail edge and cover it with a band aid for pain relief. This softens the hard skin and often provides temporary pain relief. Also focus on cutting your toe nail straight across.

If you have redness, pus drainage, or severe pain, you need to see your doctor as soon as possible.

How will my doctor care for me?

In the most minor cases, your doctor will simply cut the nail to shorten it, and show you how to cut the nail in the future, to prevent ingrowing of the nail again.

In more severe cases, your doctor may remove the ingrown portion of the nail. They will gently numb your toe and reshape the nail edge so it is not curling into your skin. Sometimes your doctor will be able to use a medicine to that area of the nail root to stop it from growing into your skin again.

Can I prevent it from happening again?

- Cut the nails **straight across**, so that the nail corner is visible.
- Avoid wearing shoes that are too tight or have a narrow toe.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by U-M Health and for which U-M Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan

Author: Crystal Murray Holmes DPM, Rebecca Burmeister DPM

Edited by: Karelyn Munro BA

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 12/2021