

Fungal Nail Infection (Onychomycosis)

What is it?

Onychomycosis is a fungal infection of the nail unit. It is most commonly caused by a group of fungi called Dermatophytes. These are the same fungi that cause athlete's foot. They are mostly harmless but can cause chronic (long-lasting) discoloration and thickening of the toenail. You do not have to treat it.

How is it treated?

Unlike athlete's foot, this infection is difficult to remove. By far, the most effective treatment is oral medication. These medications are not effective 100% of the time and have possible side effects like all medications. As such, oral medication may not be appropriate for everyone.

Topical (skin) medications by prescription, or over the counter (no prescription), are much less effective. They can contribute to an improved nail appearance with diligence, long-term use, and daily filing of the nail.

How can I prevent further infections?

To prevent further infections with tinea pedis (athlete's foot), which may cause your nail infection to recur, we suggest the following instructions:

- Avoid going barefoot in public places such as gymnasiums, locker rooms, and other athletic facilities.
- Never wear someone else's shoes.
- When staying in hotels, never go without footwear, as fungal particles may be present in the carpeting and on bathroom floors.
- Use an antifungal powder or spray, like Tinactin or Micatin, in your shoes at least once a week.

- Throw away old tennis shoes and well-worn shoes, as they may be heavily contaminated with fungal particles.
- Wear shoes that fit properly and are made of materials such as leather that allow one's foot to "breathe".
- Wear socks made to wick away moisture from skin, such as running or hiking socks.
- If you see any signs of athlete's foot recurring, restart the topical cream we recommended as soon as possible. You might also consider an over-the-counter anti-fungal cream.
- Be sure other family members who may be infected are adequately treated.
- Keep your nails well-trimmed and filed.
- Spray Lysol® to insole of shoe once per week, let air dry 24 - 48 hours.
- If you have very sweaty feet, ask your doctor about treatment.

Your doctor may also prescribe a prescription strength medication such as Penlac®, Lamisil®, or Jublia®.

What are some home remedies?

Some people find these home remedies improve the appearance of their nails:

- Mellalluca Oil - Brush top of nail with applicator once daily.
- Tea Tree Oil - Brush top of nail with applicator once daily.
- Vicks Vapor Rub® - Apply to affected toenails daily.
- NonyX® gel - Apply to affected toenails daily.

How do I care for fungal nails at home?

Supplies needed:

Disposable emery boards; cut into small sections.

Penlac®, tea tree oil, nonyX® gel, or any topical antifungal nail solution.

- The best time to care for your nails is after bathing when nails are soft.
- Cut the nails along their natural contour.

- Do not cut into the corners of the nails.
- Gently rub one section of the emery board across the nail plate and along the tip of the nails.
- Discard emery board sections after each use.
- Apply the antifungal nail solution to the nail plate.
- Repeat once to twice daily until the nail grows out completely.

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