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Ingrown Toenails

What is an ingrown toenail?

When a toenail is ingrown, the sides or corners of the nail curl down and dig into the skin, causing swelling, pain and redness.

What causes an ingrown toenail?

While many things can cause ingrown toenails, the major causes are shoes that don't fit well and improperly trimmed nails. Shoes that are too tight press the sides of the nail and make it curl into the skin. Nails that are peeled off at the edge or trimmed down at the corners are also more likely to become ingrown.

To avoid ingrown toenails, you should cut your nails straight across. The top of the nail should make a straight line.

What is the best treatment for a painful ingrown toenail?

When the problem is mild, you may only need to soak your foot in warm water for 15 to 20 minutes and place dry cotton, such as part of a cotton ball, under the corner of the nail. Signs that the problem is getting worse include increasing pain, swelling and drainage of the area. Sometimes minor surgery is needed to remove the part of the nail that is poking into the skin.

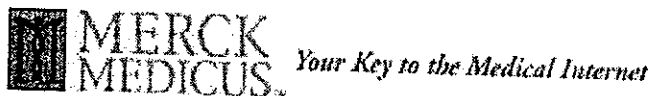
What kind of surgery is performed to fix the toenail?

Your doctor will first numb your toe by injecting it with an anesthetic. Then he or she will cut your toenail along the edge that is growing into the skin and pull out the piece of nail. Finally, your doctor may apply a small electrical charge or a liquid solution to the exposed part of the nail bed. This keeps the toenail from growing into the skin again. This part of the surgery is called ablation, and your doctor will decide whether it needs to be done. Not all patients need ablation.

What should I do to care for my toe after surgery?

- Soak your foot daily in warm water.
- Apply antibiotic ointment (some brand names: Bacitracin, Neosporin) to the site at least twice a day.
- Keep a bandage over the site until it heals.
- Take acetaminophen (one brand name: Tylenol) or ibuprofen (one brand name: Motrin) as needed for pain.
- Keep the wound clean and dry. It is okay to shower the day after surgery.
- Wear loosely fitting shoes or sneakers for the first 2 weeks.
- Avoid running or strenuous activity for the first 2 weeks.
- Call your doctor if you have problems with the area, such as increasing pain, swelling, redness or drainage.
- Avoid high heels and tight-fitting shoes now and in the future.
- Trim nails straight across. Don't pick at your nails or tear them at the corners.

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Clinical Reference Systems: Pediatric Advisor 11.0

Ingrown Toenail

DESCRIPTION

If your child has tenderness, redness, and swelling of skin around the corner of the toenail on one of the big toes, she may have an ingrown toenail. Tight shoes (for example, cowboy boots) or improper cutting of the toenails usually causes ingrown toenails. They may take several weeks to heal. Please note ? ANY signs of infection or irritation on the foot of a child with diabetes or a suppressed immune system (due to cancer, HIV, medications) should be immediately examined by a physician.

HOME CARE

1. Soaking

Soak the foot twice a day in warm water and antibacterial soap for 20 minutes. While the foot is soaking, massage outward the swollen part of the cuticle.

2. Medicated ointment

If your child's cuticle is just red and irritated, an antibacterial ointment is probably not needed. But if the cuticle becomes swollen or oozes secretions, an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment may be used as directed. If despite the ointment, the swelling and drainage persists, you should bring your child to the doctor.

3. Cutting off the corner of the toenail

The corner of the toenail rubbing against the raw cuticle usually causes the pain. Sometimes, your physician may cut this corner off so that the irritated tissue can heal more easily. Your physician needs to do this only once. The main purpose of treatment is to help the nail grow over the nail cuticle rather than get stuck in it. Therefore, during soaks try to bend the corners of the nail upward.

4. Shoes

Have your child wear sandals or go barefoot as much as possible to prevent pressure on the toenail. When your child must wear closed shoes, protect the ingrown toenail as follows: If the inner edge of the big toe is involved, tape a foam pad between the first and second toes to keep them from touching. If the outer edge is involved, tape a foam pad to the outside of the ball of the toe to keep the toenail from touching the side of the shoe.

5. Prevention

Prevent recurrences of the ingrown toenail by making sure that your child's shoes are not too narrow. Get rid of any pointed or tight shoes. After the cuticle is healed, cut the toenails straight across, leaving the corners. Don't cut the nails too short. Cut the nail weekly to prevent pressure on the end of the nail, which can push the corners into the skin. Also, after every shower or bath, lift up the corners of the nail.

CALL YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF:

- Your child develops a fever.
- A red streak spreads beyond the toe.

CALL YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICIAN DURING OFFICE HOURS IF:

- Any pus or yellow drainage is not cleared up after 48 hours of treatment.
- The cuticle has not totally healed in 2 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.

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