

# INGROWN TOENAILS

*Owwwwwwwwww!*

As we age, toenails change. They gradually become hard and thick, and lengthwise ridges can appear (a normal aging change). They start curling under at the edges. Weird, eh?

Because of this, ingrown toenails can also develop. Here are some low-tech ways to manage them.

## How to tell "ingrown":

- The edge or corner of the toenail is cutting into the skin, and the skin is red, puffy, and tender to the touch.
- The technical term for this is onychocryptosis ("OH-nick-oh--crip-TOE-sis").

## A special note for diabetics and people with peripheral neuropathy (numb feet):

- You will need to see a doctor or podiatrist for any work involving sharp instruments, due to problems with sensation and wound healing.
- While you wait for an appointment, follow instructions below for soaking and moisturizing.

## Temporary fix:

- Soak in hot bath for an hour or so, then trim toenail down away from inflamed skin.
- Problem: When toenail grows back, the problem will almost certainly return. Be prepared to work on it then!

## Longer term treatment:

1. **Intervene early**, before inflammation gets out of hand. Start with daily hot soaks (soup-pot footbath, or relaxing hot bathtub), followed by skin/nail treatment: oil or ointment and socks every night. Epsom salts and honey will shrink inflamed soft tissues, but harden nails; oils and ointments will soften nails (examples: tea tree oil, comfrey ointment, menthol-eucalyptus salve, etc.).

2. **Goal:** keep toenail relatively long, and trimmed or filed straight across (not curved at the corners), so the edges don't collide with the skin at the end of the toe. Use a straight-edged clipper (or an emery board).

3. You can **wedge a tiny piece of clean tissue** or gauze under the corner of the nail (use some kind of CLEAN tool such as a blunted/filed toothpick), trimming away the excess, to protect the underlying/impacting skin, until the nail grows long enough to clear the skin. Soak and change this dressing daily.

4. You can try **cutting a "V"** in the center of your toenail, to reduce lateral pressure on the edges when you are standing/walking. Only cut the free part - don't cut into the nail bed or your skin.

Alternatively, if you manicure your toenails and do not want a "V" cutout, you can try filing a strip at the center of the toenail (the free end of the nail, not the nail bed or your skin) to thin the nail in that area, allowing it to buckle slightly when you step on the toe.

5. **If you want surgery**, consult a podiatrist (foot doctor). I do not recommend cutting into soft tissues at home, as the risk of infection and bleeding can be very high.

## Is it infected?

- Yes, if pus is oozing out of it, or the whole toe is turning red, or a red streak is running up toward the ankle.
- Prevent infection with soaks, clean socks, antiseptics, and over-the-counter antibiotic ointments (e.g., bacitracin).
- Treat infection with antibiotics from the doc.

## Other toenail problems:

- If you have toenail fungus (yellow, crumbling nails), there are various over-the-counter and home remedies you can try. If they do not work, you can take a generic antifungal pill, \$4 per month on the Big-Box Store discount list. The treatment is very long: 12 weeks! But it works.
- The technical term for toenail fungus is onychomycosis ("OH-nick-oh--my-KOE-sis").
- Blood under toenail, with pain and pressure: See the doc, so they can drill or burn a hole through the nail and let the blood escape. I do not recommend cutting into soft tissues at home, as the risk of infection and bleeding can be very high. The injured toenail might grow out deformed, or even fall off - but a new, normal nail usually grows in after this.

**Wikipedia** has a good article on these subjects, with lots of gross and accurate photos.

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrown\\_nail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrown_nail)

*P. S. Don't forget - clean feet, clean nails, clean socks, and comfy shoes!*