Ingrown toenails

What is an ingrown toenail?

An ingrown toenail occurs when the corner or side of the nail grows down into the skin and flesh of your toe. This causes pain, redness and swelling. Rough or red skin may grow over the area. An ingrown toenail can also become infected.

Ingrown toenails are a common foot problem. Any toenail can become ingrown, but it happens most often to the big toes.

What causes an ingrown toenail?

Ingrown toenails may be caused by cutting your toenails the wrong way or by wearing shoes that are too tight around your toes.

Cutting your toenails too short or cutting them in a curve, with rounded corners, can increase the chance of getting an ingrown toenail.

Wearing sweaty sport socks can make the problem worse.

How can I prevent an ingrown toenail?

Cut your toenails straight across, leaving the corners square. Don’t pick your toenails or tear them off.

Keep your feet clean and dry. Change your socks often if your feet get sweaty. It helps to keep your bare feet open to the air as much as possible.

Wear shoes that don’t squeeze your toes.
How should I cut my toenails?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The right way</th>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Toenail Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Toenail Diagram" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Straight across the top</td>
<td>• Rounded corners</td>
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<td>• Even with the top of the toe</td>
<td>• Too short</td>
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How is an ingrown toenail treated?

Clean the area 2 or 3 times each day. Soak your foot in warm water for about 10 minutes. Use a cotton-tipped swab to gently push back the edge of the nailbed. Rinse and dry your foot.

Keep the toenail trimmed straight across.

Gently put a piece of dental floss diagonally under the corner of the nail. This should relieve the pain from the ingrown toenail.

Leave the floss in place. Replace the floss if it comes out or gets dirty. As your toenail grows, it should no longer cut into your skin.

If you think your toenail has become infected, see your doctor. If you have a severe infection, your doctor may prescribe medications.

In a few people, the infection keeps coming back and the doctor has to remove part or all of the toenail. For severe problems the root of the nail may need to be removed.