

“Do I need to be seen today?”

Let's Talk About...

Fungal Nail Infections (aka “Onychomycosis”)

What is a fungal nail infection?

Fungal nail infections are common infections of the fingernails or toenails that can cause the nail to become thick and discoloured and more likely to crack or break. Infections are more common in toenails than fingernails. The technical name for a fungal nail infection is “onychomycosis.”

Fungal nail infections can be caused by many different types of fungi (yeasts or molds) that live in the environment. Small cracks in your nail or the surrounding skin can allow these germs to enter your nail and cause an infection.

What are the signs & symptoms?

Nails with a fungal infection are often:

- Discoloured (yellow, brown, or white)
- Thick
- Fragile or cracked



Fungal nail infections are not usually painful, unless it becomes severe. Some people who have fungal toenail infections also have a fungal skin infection on the foot, especially between the toes (commonly called “athlete’s foot”).

Who gets fungal nail infections?

Anyone can get a fungal nail infection. Some people may be more likely than others to get a fungal nail infection, including older adults and people with the following conditions:

- A nail injury or nail surgery
- Diabetes
- A weakened immune system
- Blood circulation problems
- Athlete’s foot (ringworm on the foot)

What can I do to prevent fungal nail infections?

To help minimize your risk of developing a fungal nail infection, you can:

- Keep your hands and feet clean and dry
- Clip your fingernails and toenails short and keep them clean
- Avoid walking barefoot in areas like locker rooms or public showers
- Avoid sharing nail clippers
- If visiting a nail salon, choose a salon that is clean and licensed. Make sure the salon sterilizes its instruments (nail clippers, scissors, etc.) after each use or bring your own.

Should I be seen in the office?

Most fungal nail infections do not require treatment meaning patients won't benefit from an office visit.

Fungal nail infections are common, especially among older adults. Nail fungus typically does not lead to more serious medical problems and are often only a cosmetic concern. Treatments for nail fungus are available; however they are not always necessary or effective (see below). Unless the infected nail is causing pain, treatment is not usually required.

Treatment

Fungal nail infections can be difficult to cure and typically don't go away without antifungal treatment.

Topical antifungal agents (eg. medicated creams) may be used but are often costly and ineffective. For example, Jublia 10% will cost roughly \$600 to treat 1 big toe for 48 weeks. There is only 15-18% chance of completely curing the infection.

The best available treatment for a fungal nail infection is usually prescription antifungal pills taken by mouth. Treatment lasts a few months and regular blood tests are required because it can affect the liver.

In severe cases, a doctor might remove the nail completely.

It can take several months to a year for the infection to go away.

Long-term recurrence rates of fungal nail infections range from approximately 20 to 50 percent.

When to call the WCFHT

Most fungal nail infections do not require an appointment and are often only a cosmetic concern. If you have concerns, you can bring them up at your next scheduled medical appointment.

If you are experiencing pain with your nail infection, please schedule an appointment for diagnosis and treatment.