



## Suffolk Podiatry

### Fungal Toenails

#### What is a fungal nail infection?

- A fungal nail infection (also known as onychomycosis) is where a fungus is living in the nail. It is not generally a serious condition
- Toenails are more commonly affected than fingernails
- Some people tend to be more susceptible than others



#### How do you get a fungal nail infection?

- In many cases, it can occur for no apparent reason
- It is not caused by having dirty feet
- It is thought that you are more likely to develop a fungal nail infection if you have a fungal skin infection like athlete's foot
- Nails which have been damaged (due to small repetitive traumas such as tight footwear, or due to more severe traumas such as a heavy weight dropped on the toe)
- Fungal nail infections are more likely to occur when the feet have been soaked for prolonged periods as this weakens the cuticle, allowing the fungi to enter the nail

#### What are the symptoms?

- The nail may look discoloured yellow/white or be thickened
- The change in colour could be just at the tip of the nail, the base of the nail or the whole nail is sometimes affected
- The nail may become soft and crumbly. In severe cases all or part of the nail may fall off.
- The skin surrounding the nail may become inflamed and flaky
- The problem may spread to other nails (usually quite slowly)

#### How is it diagnosed?

Typically, diagnosis is made by a podiatrist or doctor who examines the nail

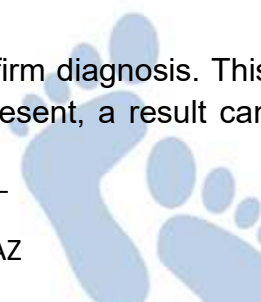
In some instances your doctor may send nail clippings to a laboratory to confirm diagnosis. This is not always reliable, as sometimes even where there is fungal infection present, a result can come back negative

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Podiatry Hub, Riverside Clinic 2-4 Landseer Rd, Ipswich, Suffolk , IP3 0AZ

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## Do I need treatment?

In most cases no treatment is needed if the infection is causing no discomfort particularly if the infection is mild.

Treatment is also not recommended if the treatment interacts with other medicines that are already being taken.

## Self-care and treatment

- Anti-fungal paints and lacquers are available from chemists or your doctor. They should be applied according to the instructions supplied
- Thickened toenails can be thinned using a nail file. Thinning the nail will help any painted lacquer treatments to penetrate the nail
- Do not share towels, socks or shoes with other people
- Your GP can prescribe antifungal tablets. You'll need to take these every day for up to 6 months.
  - Tablets can have side effects including:
    - headaches
    - itching
    - loss of taste
    - diarrhoea

You can't take antifungal tablets if you're pregnant or have certain medical conditions. There is a slight risk that they could damage your liver.

## When should I visit a podiatrist ?

- Unless you have an high risk medical condition, most patients with fungal nail infections do not require NHS podiatry and should follow the self-care advice outlined above
- Private podiatrists will often provide treatment for fungal nails for a price (e.g. thinning of thickened toenails). Be careful to ensure that any podiatrist you visit is registered with the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council). You can check their membership details by going to: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/check>

*For more information on fungal nails visit:*

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fungal-nail-infection/>

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