



Suffolk Podiatry

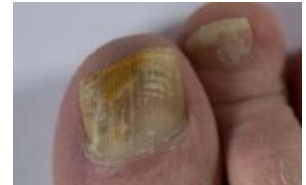
Fungal Toenails

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 much 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).
- Most people will also have athletes' foot (dry, irritated skin on sole of foot or itching between the toes).

Self-care and treatment

Anti-fungal paints and lacquers are available from a pharmacist or your GP surgery. They should be applied according to the instructions supplied. However, they are often unsuccessful.

Thickened toenails can be thinned using a nail file. Thinning the nail will help any painted lacquer treatments to penetrate the nail. Do not use this file on healthy nails as this could spread the infection.

Avoid sharing towels, socks, or shoes with other people

Your GP can prescribe antifungal tablets which can have several side effects including:

- headaches
- itching
- loss of taste
- diarrhoea
- liver damage

You cannot take antifungal tablets if you are pregnant or have certain medical conditions.

Reinfection of the nails is common, so it is important to treat any underlying fungal skin infection.

When should I visit a podiatrist?

Unless you have a 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 (e.g. thinning of thickened toenails). We recommend that you ensure any podiatrist you see 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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An NHS service provided by Suffolk GP Federation working with ESNEFT (East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust) in the East, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in the West, Suffolk County Council and Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

