

Nail problems

Nail problems are common. They can affect your fingernails and toenails. Usually they are not caused by anything serious.

It's normal for nails to:

- get thicker or break easier (brittle) as you get older
- be harder, softer or more brittle during pregnancy - but they usually get better in the 6 months after having your baby
- bruise or change colour, loosen and in time fall off after an injury

Fingernails that fall off after an injury should grow back within 6 months.

Toenails can take up to 18 months to grow back.

Causes of nail problems

Most damage to toenails and fingernails has a clear cause like:

- a [fungal nail infection](#)
- an injury
- biting your fingernails
- staining your nails, for example, by smoking or putting on a lot of nail varnish
- not cutting your nails often enough, or cutting them at an angle
- your hands often being in water or cleaning products

Nail problems can sometimes be a symptom of:

- [nail psoriasis](#)
- [iron deficiency anaemia](#)

Treatment for nail problems

There are things you can do to help with common toenail and fingernail problems.

- ✓ wear rubber gloves if your hands are often in water or you use cleaning products a lot
- ✓ clean your nails with a soft nailbrush
- ✓ put hand cream on your fingernails and fingertips often
- ✓ cut your toenails and fingernails often - it may help to cut nails after a shower or bath
- ✓ cut straight across the nail
- ✓ cut injured, loose toenails and fingernails back to where they are still attached - this helps them to grow back the way they should

Don't

- ✗ do not ignore fungal infections on your skin, such as [athlete's foot](#)
- ✗ do not cut your nails down the sides - cut straight across the top to help you from getting an [ingrown toenail](#)
- ✗ do not clean under your nails with sharp objects
- ✗ do not bite or pick your fingernails or the skin around them
- ✗ do not wear shoes that pinch your toes, especially when exercising

[How to ease toe pain](#)

Talking to your pharmacist

Talk to a pharmacist if the look of your nail bothers you or it's painful.

[Treatment for a fungal nail infection](#) is not needed unless it is painful.

Go to your GP if:

- if you notice a new black line or a new black spot under your nail
- you do not know why a fingernail or toenail has changed shape, changed colour or fallen off
- the skin around your nails has become sore, red, swollen and warm (paronychia), this can be a sign of an infection or [ingrown toenail](#)

Go to a podiatrist if:

- your toenails are too tough to cut or you cannot reach them
- your ingrown toenail needs treatment

Podiatrists and chiropodists are specialists who treat the foot and toenails.

Your GP may be able to refer you for podiatry or chiropody. You can also pay privately to go to a podiatrist or chiropodist.

[Search for a podiatrist - podiatryireland.ie](https://www.podiatryireland.ie)

Symptoms of nail problems

Check your symptoms below to find out what type of nail problem you may have.

Loose, brittle or damaged nails

[Nails that are falling off or](#)

- [loose](#)

[Brittle or crumbly](#)

- [nails](#)

Problems with the skin around your nail

[+ Ingrown toenail](#)

[Painful, red and swollen skin around the nail](#)

- [\(paronychia\)](#)

[+ Acute paronychia](#)

[+ Chronic paronychia](#)

Nails that change shape and thickness

⊥ [Thickened, overgrown nails](#)

· [Severely overgrown horn-like nails](#)

⊥ [Spoon-shaped nails \(koilonychia\)](#)

⊥ [Dents in your nails](#)

· [Deep lines across fingernails \(Beau's lines\)](#)

· [Curving fingernails \(clubbing\)](#)

Nails that change colour

▶ [Yellow nails](#)

▶ [White nails](#)

▶ [White nails with reddened or dark tips \(Terry's nails\)](#)

▶ [White lines running across nails](#)

▶ [Green-black nails](#)

▶ [Brown nails](#)

▶ [Red or yellow drop or oil drop under the nail](#)

▶ [Half white, half brown nail](#)

▶ [Dark stripes running down the nail \(melanonychia\)](#)

▶ [Red or brown little streaks under the nails](#)

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