

- Consider a referral to Podiatry only if:
 - Thickened toenails cause discomfort and you require permanent removal of the nail, which can be surgically done.
- Consider a referral to Dermatology if:
 - Oral antifungal treatment is being considered for a child.
 - The diagnosis is uncertain.
 - Treatment in primary care is unsuccessful.
 - There is co-existent nail disease, such as psoriasis or lichen planus.
 - The person is immunocompromised, depending on clinical judgement.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

Twitter.com/WhitHealth
Facebook.com/WhittingtonHealth

Whittington Health NHS Trust
Magdala Avenue
London
N19 5NF
Phone: 020 7272 3070
www.whittington.nhs.uk

Date published: 28/11/2022
Review date: 28/11/2024
Ref: ACS/Pod/FungNai/01

© Whittington Health
Please recycle



FUNGAL NAILS

A patient's guide



What are fungal nails?

These are nails that become deformed, thickened or discoloured due to a fungal infection.

Fungi thrive in warm, moist, dark environments, making footwear a perfect breeding ground.

What causes fungal nails?

Fungal infections occur because of the fungi entering under the nail due to a damaged nail plate. The fungus then spreads, due to its ability to take nutrients from Keratin. Keratin is a protein found in the skin and nails.

Who gets fungal nail infections?

Anyone can contract a fungal nail infection; however, some people are more at risk than others; these include:

- Older people (over 55) and children
- Those cutting their nails too short, as this increases the risk
- People with diabetes (twice as common)
- People with sweaty feet
- Athletes and people who frequent gyms and swimming pools
- People who live with someone who has a fungal nail
- People with athlete's foot
- People who have a nail that has been damaged
- People with psoriasis
- People who have a weakened immune system
- People with peripheral vascular disease (poor circulation)

Signs and symptoms of fungal infections

The signs of a fungal infection may vary, but may include:

- Thickened nails
- Discoloured nails
- Cracked nails
- Debris under the nail plate
- Musty odour
- Partial or full nail infection
- Brittle or crumbling nails

Diagnosis and treatment of fungal nails

Fungal nails can be diagnosed by the appearance of the nail. A sample can be sent to the lab for further investigation. This can usually be done via the GP.

The best treatment would be a course of anti-fungal medication (after a sample has been tested). There are side effects to this medication and should be discussed with the GP/Pharmacist before taking. People with some medication conditions or those pregnant will not be able to use this treatment.

Other treatments include over the counter topical lacquers that can be applied to the nail. If nothing works, then it may be beneficial to have the whole nail removed under local anaesthetic.

Other treatments may be available by accessing a Private Podiatry clinic. The management/treatment of fungal nails can be a lengthy process and can take several months.

Please note that:

- If the treatment is failing, there are other measures that can be taken by the GP:
 - Re-sampling for nail clippings and/or scrapings for fungal microscopy and culture.
 - Combination treatment with a topical and oral antifungal agent.