

# Nail Fungus (Onychomycosis)

(A common fungal infection that affects the toenails or fingernails)

## What Is Nail Fungus?

**Nail fungus**, also called **onychomycosis**, is a fungal infection involving the fingernails or toenails. It is much more common in toenails and can gradually cause the nail to become:

- Thickened
- Yellow or white
- Brittle
- Crumbly
- Distorted

Nail fungus is common and often develops slowly over time.



## What Causes Nail Fungus?

Fungal organisms grow best in warm, moist environments. Risk factors include:

- Athlete's foot
- Sweaty feet
- Tight shoes
- Nail trauma
- Aging
- Diabetes
- Poor circulation
- Immune suppression

# What Does Nail Fungus Look Like?

Common signs include:

- Yellow, white, or brown discoloration
- Thickened nails
- Crumbling edges
- Separation of the nail from the nail bed
- Distorted nail shape
- Debris under the nail

Some patients also notice odor or discomfort with shoes.

# How Is Nail Fungus Diagnosed?

Not all abnormal nails are fungal. A dermatologist may:

- Examine the nails
- Trim or scrape the nail
- Perform fungal testing if needed

This helps distinguish fungal infection from psoriasis, trauma, eczema, or other nail disorders.

# How Is Nail Fungus Treated?

Treatment depends on severity and how many nails are involved.

## Common treatment options:

- Prescription topical antifungal medications
- Oral antifungal medications
- Nail trimming and thinning
- Treatment of athlete's foot if present

Toenails grow slowly, so visible improvement may take many months.

# Pre-Op Instructions

*(Before evaluation or treatment)*

- Remove nail polish before your appointment.
- Bring a list of medications and previous fungal treatments.
- Tell us if you have diabetes, liver disease, poor circulation, or immune suppression.
- Avoid trimming nails extremely short before fungal testing.
- Bring photos if nail changes fluctuate over time.

# Post-Op Instructions

*(After starting treatment)*

- Use medication exactly as prescribed.
- Keep feet clean and dry.
- Change socks daily.
- Use breathable footwear.
- Disinfect or rotate shoes when possible.
- Continue treatment for the full recommended duration.

Call the office if:

- Pain worsens
- Redness or swelling develops
- Drainage occurs
- The nail becomes severely detached
- Medication side effects occur

## Nail Fungus (Onychomycosis) FAQ

### **Is nail fungus contagious?**

It can spread through shared surfaces, shoes, nail tools, and from athlete's foot.

### **Can nail fungus go away on its own?**

Usually no. Most cases gradually worsen without treatment.

### **How long does treatment take?**

Toenails grow slowly, so improvement may take several months to over a year.

### **Do topical medications work?**

They may help mild or early cases, but deeper infections sometimes require oral medication.

### **Is oral antifungal medication safe?**

Many patients tolerate oral treatment well, but your dermatologist will review risks, medications, and liver history first.

### **Can nail fungus come back?**

Yes. Recurrence is common, especially if athlete's foot, sweaty shoes, or fungal exposure continues.

**Can nail fungus spread to other nails?**

Yes. Untreated fungal infection can spread to additional nails or surrounding skin.

**When should I see a dermatologist?**

Schedule an evaluation if nails become painful, thickened, discolored, detached, or difficult to trim.