

Ingrown Toenails

The Center for Orthopedic Surgery

An ingrown toenail is an infection of the side of the nail, most commonly affecting the big toe. It may be caused by pressure from poorly fitting shoes or from improper trimming of the nail. Symptoms include pain, swelling, redness, and drainage.

To prevent an ingrown toenail. Make sure you trim your nails straight across and do not cut them at an angle in the corner. Leave at least 1/8th of an inch of nail beyond the nail bed. Do not wear shoes that are too small in the toe area. Wear cotton absorbent socks or sandals to prevent excessive moisture of the toes.

Once a problem develops, you should begin twice daily soaks for 10 minutes in warm soapy water. Then dry the toe thoroughly and elevate the skin up off of the nail by placing a small wisp of cotton (off of a Q-tip) beneath the leading edge of the nail that is digging in to the nail fold. If there is drainage from the toe you may need to be on antibiotics.

If the problem persists or recurs, you may be advised to have a wedge portion of the toenail removed. You can allow the edge to grow back out over the next 9 months or so, or you might chose to permanently prevent the edge of the nail from growing back. This is accomplished by using phenol, which is an acid, to kill the cells that cause the nail to grow out. This procedure is performed in the office after your toe is numbed with local anesthetic, and takes about 15 to 20 minutes.

Afterwards, a bandage is applied which you may change the following day. You should soak the toe twice daily in warm soapy water, gently cleaning it with a soft bristle new toothbrush, or a Q-tip. The toe will likely drain for 1 to 2 weeks, and you should keep a gauze bandage on it while there is drainage. If you develop severe pain, redness and swelling you should notify the office. (806)797-4985



Nails should be trimmed straight across, and left at least 1/8th of an inch long.



A wedge portion of the toenail is removed in order to clear the infection.