

# Ingrown Toenails

Oh, those aching feet! There are many problems that can affect your feet, among them is the painful condition of ingrown toenails **BY GAIL O. GUTERL**

## Why Does it Happen

An ingrown toenail occurs when skin on one or both sides of a nail grows over the edges of the nail, or the nail itself grows under the skin. It can happen for several reasons:

- The condition could be congenital, in other words you were born with it, for example, your toenails just may be too large;



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- Your shoes or stockings may be too tight or don't fit properly;
- You are not trimming your toenails properly;
- Your toes are curling as a result of a condition such as arthritis.

Any of the situations above can cause the skin around your toe to get red, painful and swollen near the nail, which could mean there is an infection in the toe. This infection can occur because the ingrown nail is in a moist, warm environment full of bacteria. When the nail breaks or penetrates the skin, it allows the germs to enter under the skin and cause an infection.

## Signs of an Infection

Signs to look for are: red streaks, hot or swollen toes, broken

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skin, cracks, sores and ulcers, which may invite infection into the affected area. Also, look for infected skin which could be indicated by breaks in the skin, with pus or clear drainage, and a foul odor.

Removing the offending nail and/or the pressure it causes will relieve the pain. If you cannot access your feet or if you have diabetes you should consult your primary care physician or foot specialist immediately.

## Prevention

The best course of action is to prevent an ingrown toenail from occurring. You can do that in several ways.

- Wear shoes with enough room for your toes.
- Trim your toenails properly, by cutting the nails with a safety nail clipper straight across so that the corner of the nail is visible. Don't cut the edge of the toenail at an angle, because that is how ingrown toenails can start. Trim your toenails after you've washed and dried your feet — the nails will be softer and safer to cut. Trim the nails to follow the natural curve of your toes. Don't cut into the corners. Use an emery board to smooth the edges.
- If you are a person with diabetes or poor circulation, you should *never* cut your own toenails or calluses. Examine your feet daily, looking at the bottom, the top and in between your toes. Look for red areas around the toenail or surrounding skin. If you do find red or sore looking spots, or any of the symptoms mentioned above, consult your healthcare provider or podiatrist.
- Excess weight can put more strain on your toes, so try to maintain a healthy weight. ■

## Resources

- Foot.com. (2005). *Ingrown toenails*. Retrieved Aug. 4, 2005 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.foot.com/info/cond\\_ingrown\\_toenails.jsp](http://www.foot.com/info/cond_ingrown_toenails.jsp)
- PDRhealth. (2004). *Freedom from foot problems*. Retrieved Aug. 23, 2005 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.pdrhealth.com/content/lifelong\\_health/chapters/fgac19.shtml](http://www.pdrhealth.com/content/lifelong_health/chapters/fgac19.shtml)
- CDC Diabetes Public Health Resource. (2005). Take charge of your diabetes. Retrieved August 23, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/tcyd/foot.htm>

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