

# Ingrown toenail?

An ingrowing toenail is a very common problem we see frequently within our clinic which can cause a lot of pain or discomfort. It is mostly the big toenails which are affected but can also affect the nails of smaller toes.

## What is an ingrown toenail?

- An ingrown toenail is caused by a piece of nail which has pierced the flesh and may have become inflamed and infected and in more severe cases cause pus and bleeding.
- An involuted nail is when one or both sides of the nail are curling around into the flesh but isn't piercing the skin however can still become red, inflamed, and painful especially if debris builds up under the sides of the nail and becomes compacted.

## What causes an ingrown toenail?

- There are several factors which may cause an ingrown toenail, some people have a genetic tendency due to the shape of their nails however can also be caused by poor nail cutting (cutting too short or cutting down the side), picking nails instead of cutting, tight fitting footwear, those who sweat excessively (making it easier for the nail to penetrate the skin) and those with brittle nails that have sharp edges.

## What are the treatment options?

- The treatment options vary depending on the severity of the problem, usually the quicker it is dealt with the less painful the treatment is.
- For involuted nails, the part of the nail curling into the flesh will be removed and any debris cleared.
- If a nail spur (spikey bit of nail digging into the skin) is causing the problem this will be removed and an antiseptic dressing applied.
- Depending on whether infection is present and how severe the infection is, the toe may be too painful to touch or carry out treatment on in which case a local anaesthetic may be required first before removing the offending bit of nail. In some cases, a course of antibiotics may also be required.
- For those who are particularly prone to ingrown nails it may be advisable to have either a portion or all the nail removed permanently. This procedure is done under local anaesthetic and involves using a chemical to cauterise the nail matrix and prevent the nail from growing back although there is a 10% change of regrowth as some people are more resistance to the chemical used to burn the nail bed. This treatment has prolonged healing therefore requires subsequent visits to the clinic to have the toe redressed.

## How can I prevent an ingrown toenail?

- Correct nail cutting - cutting the nails straight across and avoiding cutting down the sides of the nails.
- Avoiding picking the nails.
- Good hygiene by avoiding moist feet and changing socks/hosiery/shoes frequently.
- Avoiding tight fitting footwear such as shoes with a tapered toe box as this will cause more pressure and pushes the skin into the sides of the nails. Click on the link below to view our website for services offered.

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