

Dr. Melody Chong D.P.M.

3838 California Street, Suite #514 • San Francisco, CA 94118

Tel. (415) 386-3338 (FEET)

Ingrown Toenails

What Are Ingrown Toenails?

Ingrown nails, the most common nail impairment, are nails whose corners or sides dig painfully into the soft tissue of nail grooves, often leading to irritation, redness, and swelling. Usually, toenails grow straight out. Sometimes, however, one or both corners or sides curve and grow into the flesh. The big toe is the most common location for this condition, but other toes can also become affected.

Causes

Ingrown toenails may be caused by the following:

- Improperly trimmed nails
- Heredity
- Shoe pressure; crowding of toes
- Repeated trauma to the feet from normal activities

Symptoms

The following symptoms may be present with ingrown toenails:

- Pain
- Redness and swelling
- Drainage
- Odor
- Prominent skin tissue (proud flesh)

Home Treatment

If you suspect an infection due to an ingrown toenail, immerse the foot in a warm salt water soak, or a basin of soapy water, then apply an antiseptic and bandage the area.

People with diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, or other circulatory disorders must avoid any form of self-treatment and seek podiatric medical care as soon as possible.

Other “do-it-yourself” treatments, including any attempt to remove any part of an infected nail or the use of over-the-counter medications, should be avoided. Nail problems should be evaluated and treated by your podiatrist, who can diagnose the ailment, and then prescribe medication or another appropriate treatment.

When to Visit a Podiatrist

You should see a podiatrist immediately if any drainage or excessive redness is present around the toenail. Also, if a short trial of home treatment has not resulted in improvement of the condition, see your podiatrist. If you have diabetes or poor circulation, you should seek immediate treatment at the first signs of an ingrown toenail, as it can lead to more severe complications.

Diagnosis and Treatment

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A podiatrist will remove the ingrown portion of the nail and may prescribe a topical or oral medication to treat the infection. If ingrown nails are a chronic problem, your podiatrist can perform a procedure to permanently prevent ingrown nails. The corner of the nail that ingrows, along with the matrix or root of that piece of nail, are removed by use of a chemical, a laser, or other methods.

Prevention

- Trim toenails properly: cut them straight across, not longer than the tip of the toes. Do not dig into corners and only gently round off corners with a nail file. Use toenail clippers.
- Avoid shoes with pointy or narrow toe boxes.
- Never rip or tear edges of nails.