

Fungal Nails

What are Fungal Nails?

Fungal nail infection is very common, particularly in the toenails. Around half of all nail problems are due to fungal nail infection. It usually affects adults, and affects more men than women. It also becomes more common as you get older. It can cause dramatic visual changes to a nail which can be unsightly. They can make the nail change colour, can thicken and can break more easily and as the infection progresses they can produce a very distinct odour.



What causes it?

Dermatophytes are fungi that cause superficial infections of the skin, these fungi are spread by direct contact with other people, animals and soil. These fungi often live harmlessly on your skin, but they can sometimes multiply and lead to infections, this is because they prefer warm, dark and moist places like the feet. If an individual doesn't keep their feet clean and dry or wears shoes that cause feet to get hot and sweaty this can lead to rapid multiplying of the fungi that causes the infection.

What will happen if I leave it untreated?

As it progresses, the infection can cause a discolouration of the nail, this can turn white, black, yellow or green. It can produce a thickening and distortion of the nail, if it becomes an unusual shape or texture the nail can become difficult to trim. Due to this distortion, it can produce some pain and discomfort, particularly when using or placing pressure on the affected toes.

What can help?

Individuals can reduce their risk of developing a fungal nail infection by keeping feet clean and dry also by wearing well-fitting shoes made of natural materials and clean cotton socks which will allow the feet to breathe. Making sure to clip nails to keep them short will help reduce the area available to infection. It can be helpful to not share towels and socks with other people, and to ensure that towels are washed regularly this will help to get rid of any fungal residue that builds up.

What are the treatment options?

There is a choice of either oral or topical anti-fungal treatments. Oral anti-fungal treatments can be prescribed by your GP if you are suitable.

Topical treatments are available over the counter or from your podiatrist. Fungal nails infections can take a long time to resolve (12months +), but the proper preparation of the nail surface by a podiatrist prior to applying the topical agent can increase the success.