Memorial SPORTS MEDICINE INSTITUTE

111 W. Jefferson Blvd, Suite 100
South Bend, IN 46601
Phone: (574) 289-4764
Fax: (574) 647-6927

Education

Ingrown Toenail

What is an ingrown toenail?

An ingrown toenail is a toenail that grows into the surrounding skin or tissue of the toe. The toenail on the big toe is the one that is most commonly ingrown.

How does it occur?

An ingrown toenail usually occurs as a result of improper nail trimming. If a nail is cut curved instead of straight across, it may grow into the flesh at the edge of the nail and become ingrown.

Nails may also become ingrown as a result of direct blows or from wearing shoes or boots that are too tight.

What are the symptoms?

An area around the corners and edges of the toenail is painful. The toe may be swollen and red. There may be drainage. A toe with an ingrown toenail that becomes infected will be red and swollen and will have pus.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your toe.

How is it treated?

Discomfort may be relieved by soaking your foot in a basin of warm water two or three times a day.

If only a small part of your toenail is ingrown, the corner of the nail can be lifted up with a pair of tweezers and a small piece of cotton placed underneath this part of the nail. Change the piece of cotton every day. Keep the feet clean and dry. Wear clean socks every day and open toed shoes or sandals.

Your health care provider may remove all or part of the ingrown nail. He or she will use numbing medicine before doing this. To prevent the nail from becoming ingrown again your provider may put a chemical on the nail growth area or may surgically remove the growth area.

Your health care provider may prescribe antibiotics if your toe is infected.

How long will the effects last?

Your toe pain will start to improve as soon as the nail is removed. You may return to your normal activities when you no longer have pain in your toe. It is important that your shoes fit well.

How can I prevent an ingrown toenail?

- Trim your toenails straight across without curving the edges.
- Wear shoes that do not cramp your toes.
- Cushion a nail that presses into the skin by putting cotton under the corners and edges that tend to become ingrown.

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