

## **Fungal Nails (Onychomycosis): Causes, Recognition and Treatment**

Fungal nails — often referred to as thickened or “chalky” nails — are a common problem affecting the feet and sometimes the hands. They often appear yellowish, brittle, or thickened and can be quite persistent. Fortunately, they can be treated — especially when addressed early. In this informative guide, you will learn what fungal nails are, how they develop, how to recognize them, and what you can do to treat and prevent them.

### **What Are Fungal Nails?**

A fungal nail is a nail infected with a fungus. The medical term is *onychomycosis*. Despite the common name, it has nothing to do with calcium. The name originated because the nail often becomes yellow-white and crumbly, as if covered with chalk.

The fungus settles under or inside the nail and feeds on keratin — the protein that forms your nails. As a result, the nail structure gradually changes. The infection usually begins at the edge of the nail and spreads toward the cuticle.

Fungal nails occur most frequently in toenails, especially the big toe. This is because fungi thrive in warm, moist environments — such as inside socks and shoes.

### **How Do You Recognize a Fungal Nail?**

Fungal nails usually develop gradually. At first, you may only notice slight discoloration. Over time, symptoms may become more visible.

Common signs include:

- Yellow, white, or brown discoloration
- Thickening of the nail
- Crumbly or brittle edges
- Separation of the nail from the nail bed
- A dull appearance
- Sometimes an unpleasant odor

In some cases, a fungal nail may become sensitive or painful, especially if the nail becomes very thick or presses against the shoe.

If you are unsure whether it is a fungal infection, a specialized pedicurist can determine whether it is indeed a fungal nail or another condition, such as nail damage or psoriasis.

### **How Do Fungal Nails Develop?**

Fungal nails are caused by infection with dermatophytes (skin fungi), yeasts, or fungal spores. These microorganisms are present everywhere but are more likely to cause infection under favorable conditions.

Risk factors include:

- Warm, moist feet



- Excessive sweating in closed shoes
- Public spaces such as swimming pools, saunas, and gyms
- Small nail injuries
- Poor circulation in the feet
- Diabetes
- Reduced immunity
- Older age

Fungal nail infections often begin with athlete's foot. If left untreated, the fungus can spread to the nails.

### **Are Fungal Nails Contagious?**

Yes, fungal nails are contagious. The infection can spread from one nail to another or to other people. This can occur through:

- Shared towels
- Floors in locker rooms or showers
- Nail clippers or files
- Tight, poorly ventilated shoes

Good hygiene is essential. Always dry your feet thoroughly, especially between the toes, and use your own nail care tools.

### **What Can You Do About Fungal Nails?**

Treating fungal nails requires patience. The nail must grow out completely before full results are visible. For toenails, this can take 9 to 12 months.

There are several treatment options:

#### **Antifungal Products for Home Use**

These include medicated nail lacquers, creams, or solutions with antifungal properties. They often need to be applied daily or weekly for several months.

Important: The nail often needs to be filed thinner first so the product can penetrate effectively. This is where a specialized pedicurist can provide valuable support.

#### **Medication Prescribed by a Doctor**

In persistent cases, a physician may prescribe oral antifungal medication. These work from the inside but may have side effects and are not suitable for everyone.

#### **Professional Treatment by a Specialized Pedicurist**



A specialized pedicurist can professionally reduce the thickness of the nail, allowing antifungal products to work more effectively. You will also receive personalized advice on care, hygiene, and prevention.

Regular treatment increases the chances of recovery and reduces the risk of recurrence.

### **Why Is Early Treatment Important?**

The earlier you address a fungal nail, the greater the chance of success. In the early stages, the fungus is still superficial and the nail is less damaged. If you wait too long, the nail can become increasingly thick and crumbly.

In severe cases, the nail may partially detach or grow inward, causing additional problems. The fungus can also spread to other nails or the surrounding skin.

If you notice the first signs of discoloration or thickening, it is advisable to take action immediately.

### **Can You Prevent Fungal Nails?**

Although fungal nails cannot always be completely prevented, you can significantly reduce the risk with a few simple measures:

- Wear breathable shoes made of leather or other ventilating materials
- Change socks daily
- Prefer cotton or bamboo socks
- Dry your feet thoroughly after showering
- Wear flip-flops in public showers
- Trim your nails straight and not too short
- Treat athlete's foot immediately

Regular foot care also helps. By maintaining your nails properly and preventing small injuries, you reduce the opportunity for fungi to develop.

### **When Should You Consult a Specialized Pedicurist?**

The general rule is: better too early than too late. As soon as you notice discoloration, thickening, or a crumbly texture, it is wise to consult a specialized pedicurist.

A pedicurist can:

- Professionally clean and thin the nail
- Assess the severity of the infection
- Recommend effective products
- Guide you throughout the treatment process
- Prevent the infection from spreading



Moreover, a pedicurist works hygienically and with professional tools, which reduces the risk of further contamination.

### **Take Fungal Nails Seriously**

Fungal nails may not be life-threatening, but they can be persistent and uncomfortable. They often look unsightly, may cause discomfort, and can spread easily if left untreated.

By taking the first signs seriously and seeking timely help, you significantly increase the likelihood of successful treatment.

If you notice early discoloration, thickening, or crumbly edges, do not wait. Have your nails assessed by a specialized pedicurist at the first signs. The sooner you act, the sooner you can restore healthy, well-groomed nails.

