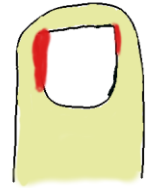


# Ingrown Toenail

## What is it?

An ingrown toenail is a condition where your toenail is putting pressure on the surrounding skin/tissue, causing pain to develop in your toe. This may cause a break in the tissue and lead to the classic looking infected toenail, however it can also be more subtle. In some instances, there may be some more minor rubbing and pressure that doesn't cause your skin to break, however it can cause a lot of irritation and pain.



## What are the symptoms?

Pain in the toe, and on investigation pain around the edge of the toenails. Your toe may be red and there may be fluid or pus coming from the side of the nail if it has pierced the skin. In some cases, there will be no redness at all, but when you press around the edge of the nail you can feel pain. A lot of people notice that they have pain in the toe with the weight of the bed sheets or when they wear particular shoes.

## Why me?

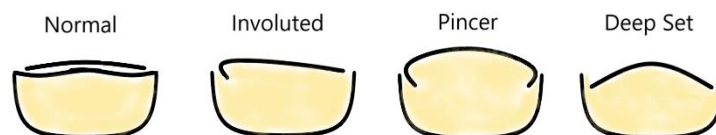
There are a number of factors that can lead to you developing an ingrown nail.

- Poor nail cutting techniques
- Shape of the nail plate
- Trauma to the nail
- Tight shoes

Poor nail cutting technique – cutting down into the corners or tearing toenails are risk factors to developing ingrown nails.

Shape of the nail plate – as you can see from the picture above, nails come in all different shapes and sizes. Some of these shapes are more likely to cause problems than others. With involuted and pincer nails, we can run into trouble if the nails get cut too short in the corners, and they can become impacted as they grow out. With the deep set nails, often the only way to manage them is to trim very carefully into the corners, ensuring that no jagged edges are left.

## Nail Shapes



Trauma to the nail – this can cause an otherwise good toe into becoming an ingrown nail. Trauma and damage to the nail can leave a jagged edge to the nail that becomes impacted as it regrows. Certain nail shapes are again going to be more at risk – the involuted and pincer.

Tight shoes – tight shoes can crowd your toes and cause the nail to be pressed into the flesh. Wearing shoes with more of a square toe box can help to alleviate this. Also, if you are a wearer of pressure stockings, they can also cause excessive pressure around the toes. This can often be alleviated by pulling the tips of your stockings to loosen their fit before putting footwear on.

## How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the type of ingrown toenail and your goals. The first step is always to settle the area down and this can normally be achieved by removing the offending piece of nail that is causing the pressure/break in the skin. Once this is removed, the

area can begin to heal.

Now removing the piece of nail may sound easy, but when the toe is inflamed it can be difficult and painful to do. Our podiatrists are highly skilled and equipped with special equipment to make this as pain free as possible. They are also able to administer a local anesthetic injection, however most toes do not require this.

Depending on what caused you ingrown nail in the first place, it may return and become an ongoing problem for you. Your podiatrist will recommend a review time depending on the severity of the condition, and this is important so that we can then plan any further treatment.

Further treatment could include:

- Regular visits to reshape and train the nail
- Minor nail surgery to reduce the risk of recurrence
- Nail bracing

Regular Visits – regular visits can be about looking to retrain the nail to allow the affected edge to grow out without putting further pressure on the surrounding skin. This can be done through shaping your nail, packing around the nail to lift it and allow it to grow forward and/or using a nail brace. Sometimes, the shape of the nail is such that the edge will not grow out normally, and regular visits become about clearing the edge of the nail out to relieve discomfort and/or prevent recurrence.

Nail Surgery – when we find that nails are not responding to regular visits, nail surgery is an option. This is a procedure that is performed in our office, requiring the injection of a local anaesthetic into the toe. We then remove the offending portion of nail to prevent recurrence. There can be some minor discomfort post procedure, but generally no more than having a tooth removed.

Nail Bracing – nail bracing is another option to help retrain the nail. It involves using high tension wires (like used in mouth braces) to apply a force to lift the nail out of the nail sulcus.

### ***What can I do at home?***

If you have developed an ingrown toenail, you can take the following steps at home.

Avoid wearing tight fitting shoes that may be irritating the toe

Very carefully trim your nail to remove the offending piece that is putting pressure on the skin. In some cases this may be quite easy to do, in some toes it can be quite difficult depending on the shape and thickness of the nail. If you try this step and don't get relief, it is time to seek our help.

If the toe is inflamed with pus or fluid, you can soak the toe in salty water, dry thoroughly and then use an antiseptic liquid or ointment to help control the infection. If the red area continues to grow larger even with this treatment, you may need to see your GP for antibiotics to help settle this down.

### ***Take home message?***

If you try all of these steps and yet your toe is still giving you issues, it is time to see us for professional management of your toe. We will assess your toe, tell you what is specifically causing your problem and create a personal plan to fix it. You do not need to be suffering from the effects of your toe. To make an appointment, call us on 3820 6326 or you can book [online](#).