

Patient Fact Sheet

Fungal Nail Infections



What is it?

As the name suggests, fungal nail infection is caused by a fungus, the same fungus that can cause athlete's foot. Nearly a third of people who have untreated athlete's foot will develop fungal nail infections.

How do I know if I've got it?

The problem usually starts at the end and the side of the toenail, spreading slowly towards the base of the nail. The big toe nail is often the first affected. You'll notice a change in the nail colour, often they become creamy white, yellow and occasionally green in the infected area. The nail itself starts to thicken, beginning with the underside and then the end may become raised. The nail may become crumbly, it may start to split and then separate from the nail bed and even come away completely.

Who gets it and how?

Fungal nail infections affect over one million people in this country. It seems to become more common the older you get and rarely affects children. The infection almost always occurs in people who have suffered with athlete's foot. The fungus can enter the nail after the nail has been damaged, it can be found on fingernails but is more common on toenails. This condition can be confused with other nail conditions such as Psoriasis or even old age nails.

How do I treat it?

A visit to your doctor or chiropodist is important to establish that it is fungal nail infection. Your doctor may prescribe tablets which will cure this infection. Your chiropodist will thin the thickened nail down and may prescribe a paint or cream, they will also give you advice on treating your footwear and how to prevent cross infection. This condition if left untreated will progress to the other nails very quickly.