

Thick Nails

What is a thick nail?

- A thick nail is an abnormal change in the nail. It can affect fingernails and toenails.
- A thick nail can get infected and painful if you do not treat it.



What causes a thick nail?

Onychomycosis

- Onychomycosis is a nail fungus. It is the main cause of thick nails.
- **Onychomycosis is more common in people who:**
 - › have diabetes.
 - › take immunosuppressant medication (medication that lowers your immune system).

Psoriasis

- Psoriasis is a disorder that causes red, itchy, and scaly thick skin all over the body. It can spread to the nails and cause thick nails.

Onychogryphosis (ram's horn nails)

- Onychogryphosis causes 1 side of the nail to grow faster and thicker, and look curvy (like a horn or a claw).
- Onychogryphosis usually happens on the big toe. It is often painful.

Trauma

- You can cause trauma (serious injury or damage) to your toenails by wearing very tight shoes or shoes that do not fit well.

Getting older

- Getting older does not cause thick nails. As you get older, less blood flow, trauma, or wearing shoes that do not fit well can cause thick nails.

You may be at a higher risk for a thick nail if you:

- › walk barefoot in public places with wet floors (like a swimming pool, shower, or gym).
- › let your feet or shoes get wet for a long time.
- › have sweaty feet and shoes.
- › wear tight shoes and high heels that squeeze your feet.
- › have athlete's foot (an infection caused by fungus). It usually appears first between the toes then spreads to your toenails.
- › have diabetes.
- › have a condition that causes poor blood flow (like peripheral vascular disease or blood clots).
- › take immunosuppressant medication.
- › have psoriasis.
- › damage a toenail.
- › have a family member who has a thick nail.
- › smoke.

How is a thick nail treated?

A thick nail can be treated by:

- › Keeping your nails trimmed regularly.
- › Wearing shoes that fit well and do not cause pressure on your toes.
- › Having a podiatrist (a doctor that specializes in the feet) or a foot clinic nurse debride your nails by removing layers. Sometimes, even with debridement, they may need more debriding treatment in the future.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Foot Clinic, Eastern Memorial Hospital
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services