

How to Avoid Ingrown, Black, and Damaged Toenails

Dr. Rion Berg



By downloading this book, you've expressed interest in learning more about ingrown, black, and damaged toenails. I'm Dr. Rion Berg. As a podiatrist with over 40 years experience in Seattle, Washington I've seen my share of problematic toenails. I wrote this book because many of these conditions can be avoided. I'll talk about how to prevent them and the types of home and in office treatment that are available.

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Introduction

Black toenails. Ingrown toenails. Damaged toenails. Fungal toenails. Ugly toenails. Many people at some point in their life have a toenail problem. While most of these toenail conditions are simply embarrassing and ugly to look at, they can be painful and occasionally can hide a problem with harmful consequences.

As a podiatrist for over 40 years in Seattle, Washington I've seen my share of problematic toenails. I wrote this book remedies you can use at home and what podiatrists do to treat them.

Ingrown Toenails

The most common toenail condition I see in my office is ingrown toenails. They occur when the edge of a toenail grows into the surrounding skin, causing discomfort and, in some cases, infection.

Symptoms

At first, you'll have some irritation along the border of your toenail. But if you don't get it treated, it can develop into a full-blown infection that's excruciating.

In addition to pain, you can also experience the following symptoms:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Warmth
- Drainage
- Yellow pus
- Tender to the touch
- Too painful to walk or play sports



Causes of Ingrown Toenails

There are several reasons why toenails become ingrown:

- Improper Nail Trimming: Cutting nails too short or rounding the edges can encourage the nail to grow into the skin.
- Bad Fitting Footwear: Shoes that are too short, too narrow, or too long can all be culprits in ingrown toenails. Short and narrow shoes can force the nail edges into the skin. Shoes that are too long can also cause the feet to slide forward into the front of the shoes.
- Injury: Trauma to the toe, such as stubbing it or repeated pressure (e.g., sports activities), can cause the nail to become ingrown.
- Fungal toenail infection: A toenail fungus infection can cause unusual nail growth and cause an ingrown toenail.
- Genetics: Some individuals have naturally curved or thick nails, making them more prone to ingrown toenails.

At-Home Treatments for Ingrown Toenails

For mild cases of ingrown toenails or while you're waiting to see the podiatrist, you can try the following at-home remedies. Keep in mind, if you have a condition like diabetes or are immune compromised you should never wait to see a podiatrist to get your toenails treated.

- **Soak Your Foot:** Soak the affected foot in warm, soapy water for 15-20 minutes several times a day. This helps soften the skin and reduce swelling.
- **Use a Cotton or Dental Floss Lift:** Gently lift the edge of the nail using clean dental floss or a small piece of cotton to keep it from growing into the skin. Change the cotton or floss daily.
- **Apply an Antibiotic Ointment:** If there are signs of infection, applying an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment can help prevent complications.
- **Wear Open-Toed Shoes:** Allow your toe to breathe and prevent further irritation by avoiding closed-toed shoes until the nail improves.

Treatment At Your Podiatrist's Office

If your ingrown toenail requires professional treatment, your podiatrist may recommend one of the following options:

- **Partial nail removal or nail avulsion:** In this procedure, a portion of the nail is removed to alleviate pressure on the skin. It is done under local anesthesia and provides immediate relief. The inflammation around the nail usually subsides in a few days.
- **Antibiotics:** If there is an infection, your doctor may prescribe oral or topical antibiotics to clear it up.
- **Matrixectomy:** In some cases, the nail matrix (root) is treated to prevent the nail from growing back, particularly if the problem is chronic. In this procedure the "root cells" which lie just under the toenail are cauterized with a chemical to prevent recurrence of the ingrown toenail.

After medical treatment for an ingrown toenail, follow these steps to promote healing:

- **Post Op Instructions:** Follow the instructions provided by your podiatrist to ensure your toe heals properly.
- **Protect the Toe:** Wear open-toed shoes or loose-fitting footwear until the toe heals.
- **Avoid Strain:** Limit activities that put pressure on the toe, such as running or tight shoe wear.
- **Follow-up:** Attend follow-up appointments to ensure the nail is healing properly and to address any lingering issues.

Long-term Management and Prevention

To avoid future ingrown toenails:

- **Maintain Good Foot Hygiene:** Regularly clean and moisturize your feet to keep your nails healthy.
- **Trim Nails Correctly:** Cut toenails straight across and don't cut them too short.
- **Wear The Right Shoes:** Always choose shoes with a wide toe box, that fit properly, and don't compress your toes. Get your feet measured at the shoe store keeping in mind that even adults feet can get longer.
- **Be Cautious with Nail Salons:** If you get pedicures, ensure the salon uses sterile tools and trims your nails correctly. You can also try a do-it-yourself pedicure.

Black and Damaged Toenails

While black and damaged toenails are common in runners, hikers, climbers, and other athletes, you can also develop them by dropping something heavy on your toes or by stubbing them on furniture in your house. On rare occasion a black toenail can be a sign of cancer.

Mostly though, black and damaged toenails are so common in runners that they even have their own name—Runner's Toe. While many runners consider a black toe a rite of passage, they aren't inevitable. The same is true for hikers and climbers.

Causes of Black and Damaged Toenails

Poorly Fitting Shoes

The biggest culprit in black and damaged toenails are poorly fitting shoes and boots. Wearing shoes or boots that are too short or long can be problematic. When you hike or run, footwear that is too short will cause your toenails to push against the inside of your footwear. Wearing footwear that's too long will cause your feet to slide forward into the front of your shoes.

When this happens repeatedly you can develop a subungual hematoma under the nails. When the blood turns black, so will your nails. The constant pressure on your nails can also cause them to thicken and distort. While a black toenail will eventually fall off and a new nail will replace it, once your nails become damaged they won't grow back normally.

Changes to Your Foot Structure

Your nails can also get damaged if your arches flatten out, causing your feet to increase in size. It's important to get your feet measured even as an adult so that you buy the correct size shoes or boots.

Toenails Are Too Long

If your toenails are too long, they'll also run into the top of your shoes or boots. Keep them cut short, but not too short.

Toenail Cancer

While extremely rare, the possibility of toenail cancer should be ruled out particularly if there is no apparent reason for your nail to be black. For example, if you aren't an athlete and haven't damaged your toenail by stubbing it or dropping something on it, get it checked out. Here are some other warning signs.

- A new brown or black band in the nail
- Dark color is spilling over the skin next to the nail
- Signs of infection such as drainage, pus, and pain
- A bruise, splitting, or bleeding of the nail without any trauma
- A bruise under the nail that doesn't go away with time

If you have any of these signs or symptoms, it's important to see a podiatrist or other doctor right away.



Treatment of Black, Damaged, or Loose Toenails

- Most of the time the only thing you need to do to treat a black toenail is to let it grow out.
- However, if it's extremely painful due to the blood build-up under the nail, it will need to be drained by a podiatrist to relieve the pressure.
- If you're out running or hiking and your toenail comes loose, don't rip it off. Keep the nail attached by using tape to help prevent infection. Soak your toe in salt water for 15 minutes. Apply an antibiotic cream after soaking and cover with a bandage.
- If you notice drainage, pus, or red streaks going up your toe these are signs of infection. Be sure to see a podiatrist right away.

Prevention of Black, Damaged, or Loose Toenails

Buy the Right Footwear

If you're a runner, hiker, or climber the key to preventing black and damaged toenails is buying the right footwear. See below for more information;

- [How to Buy the Best Running Shoes for Your Feet](#)
- [How to Buy Hiking Boots to Prevent Plantar Fasciitis](#) (this eBook is also excellent for preventing toenail damage)

Clip Your Toenails Properly

Keep your toenails properly cut. Ensure they don't hit the top of your shoe. Trim them straight across to avoid ingrown toenails.

Buy Your Socks With Your Footwear

If you buy your socks when you buy your footwear you can ensure they are the right thickness. Socks that are too thick can also cause toenail problems.

Lace Your Footwear Properly

Some people have trouble keeping their feet from sliding forward in their footwear even if they're the right size. This can happen if you have very narrow heels. Here are some lacing techniques for hikers and runners.

- [4 Best Lacing Hacks to Prevent Foot Pain in Hikers](#)
- [Heel Lock Lacing Technique for Runners](#)

Fungal Toenails

Most people come to me with fungal toenails because they're embarrassing. But fungal toenails can also be painful, can be transmitted to others, become difficult to cut, cause distorted toenails, and increase the risk of ulcers in people with diabetes.

The message is—even if you don't care about how they look, don't ignore them.

[Learn more about treatment and prevention of fungal toenails here!](#)

Or download my eBook, ["Guide to Eliminating Fungal Toenails"](#).