

Toenail Fungus: A Persistent Problem



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the doctor can treat it effectively so it eventually clears up. If a toenail fungus infection is allowed to worsen, that is, to go untreated, the pain might make working or walking difficult.

The infection is caused by fungi, slowly growing microorganisms that are hard to avoid; they thrive in damp areas such as locker rooms, showers, and swimming pools where one is also likely to be barefoot. A prior diagnosis of athlete's foot, diabetes, poor circulation, an immunodeficiency condition, or trauma due to sports or an injury, advanced age, consistently

sweaty feet or other skin conditions are all risk factors and make one more susceptible to fungal nail infections (which can affect hands as well as feet).

To diagnose the con-

dition, a podiatrist would examine the toenails and may send a portion of a nail to a laboratory for a definitive diagnosis, one that would target precisely the organism causing your infection. Treatment could include both oral antifungal and topical medica-

tions (both monitored by your podiatrist), and could take months. Even then, the infection might not be permanently cured.

Onychomycosis is difficult to cure because the fungus responsible for the infection grows very slowly, and it is hard to get the

medicine under the nail. In some stubborn cases, surgery to remove the nail may be necessary. Removal allows the application of topical medication directly to the nail bed.

Keeping your feet clean and dry are most important for prevention. Also:

- Wear shower shoes in damp public areas.
- Change shoes and socks daily.
- Wear socks made of synthetic fiber that "wicks" moisture away.
- Wear well-fitting shoes. Avoid tight hosiery.
- Make sure all tools used to cut nails are disinfected.
- Trim toenails straight across so they don't extend past the tip of toes.



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