

# FUNGAL NAILS:

What are they  
and what can  
you do about  
them today?

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# CONTENTS

**03**

Introduction

**04**

Fungal Nails: Symptoms & Causes

**05**

Fungal Nail Prevention Methods

**06**

Treatments for Fungal Nails

## Nail Mycosis (Onychomycosis)



# INTRODUCTION

**Fungal nails (or onychomycosis)** is an infection of the nail, as well as the bed and plate underlying the surface of the nail caused by a group of fungi known as *dermophytes*. These tiny organisms thrive on skin and keratin, which is the main component of hair and nails. When dermophytes take hold, the nail often discolours. Eventually, the nail might thicken, harden, become brittle and even fall off. The resulting thicker nails are difficult to trim and make walking painful when wearing shoes.

This infection of the nail is capable of spreading to other toenails, and even the fingernails. If left untreated, the infection could spread and make it uncomfortable to walk in enclosed footwear.

In this guide, we discuss the symptoms and causes of toenail fungus, how to prevent the disease, or stop it in its tracks.

# SYMPTOMS & CAUSES OF FUNGAL NAILS

Fungal infection of the toenails is a common foot health problem, however, it is often an overlooked one. Many people afflicted with it don't get treatment. They may not realise that the problem even exists. They may think thickened nails is a natural symptom of ageing. Or sometimes they miss the changes because they happen so gradually. Fungal nails can be present for years without causing pain. Or in some cases, the change is passed off as something very minor, but it is anything but that.



Whichever is the case, the infection is characterised by a progressive change in toenail quality and colour (often turning white, brown, or yellow). It can start as a mere blemish and turn into ugly, embarrassing nails. This change in colour is the start of an aggravating disease that ultimately could take months to control if left ignored.

# FUNGAL NAIL PREVENTION METHODS

Clean, dry feet resist disease. By following prevention measures, including washing and regularly inspecting your feet, you can reduce or even halt the chances of fungal nails reoccurring.

- Wash your feet with soap and water, remembering to dry thoroughly.
- Wear shower shoes when possible in public areas.
- Change your shoes, socks, or hosiery a couple of times a day.
- Wear shoes that fit well and are made of breathable materials, such as canvas or leather.
- Use a quality talcum foot powder.

- Avoid wearing excessively tight hosiery to decrease moisture.
- Wear socks made of synthetic fibre that “wicks” moisture away from your feet faster than cotton or wool socks do.
- Use an antifungal laundry detergent such as canestan to wash your socks and hosiery.
- Keep your shower clean to avoid passing on the infection to others.
- Disinfect the instruments you use to cut your nails.
- Disinfect your home pedicure tools.
- Don’t apply nail polish to your nails if you think they’re infected. You could be infecting the rest of your nails.
- Strengthen your immune system by eating food rich in antioxidants such as fruit and vegetables.



# FUNGAL NAILS TREATMENT

You should see a podiatrist when you notice discolouration, thickening, or deformity in your toenails. The earlier you seek medical treatment, the greater your chance at getting your nails in the clear. Trying to solve the infection without the help of a medical professional can lead to more problems.



*We may rule you out from treatment if you have a loss of sensation in your feet, or if you're pregnant, or are breastfeeding.*

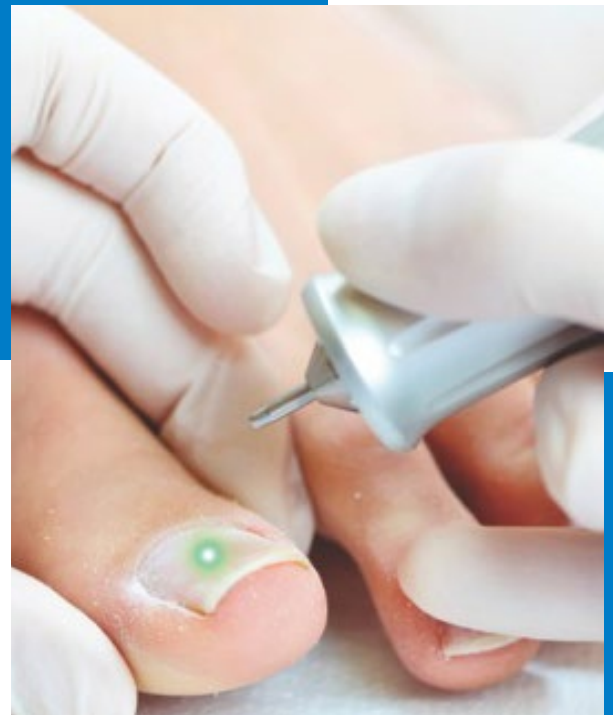
Before we start treatment, we will examine your toenails to see if you do have a fungal infection. The signs we look out for include:

- yellow to white discoloration
- thickening of the nail which shows a more extensive fungal nail infection
- how many nails have been infected

We will also give you advice about how to prevent the infection recurring.

## At Capital Podiatry, the treatment we recommend may vary, depending on the nature and severity of your infection.

The primary way we treat a fungal nail infection is by using laser therapy.



- ✓ We slowly trace a laser beam across every one of your toenails.
- ✓ The laser beam generates heat in the nails and kills the fungus infecting your nail bed.
- ✓ If your nail is thickened, we will first gently reduce the nail thickness to expose the infected area. This means that the laser will be better able to penetrate the infected layer of your nail.

*We recommend **two laser therapy appointments** that are four weeks apart. That way, we can attack any persistent fungal spores.*

