

## Onychomycosis/Fungal Toenails

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**What is it?** Consider it similar to getting a bacterial infection of your toenails, except that is caused by fungus.

**Why me?** Fungal infections affect all ages, sexes, races and creeds. There may be many factors that predispose you to a fungal infection such as age, coexisting medical conditions such as diabetes, or an autoimmune disease, stress, medications, fatigue etc. Bottom line: fungus thrives in warm and moist environments, and your shoes offer such a location.

**Is it contagious?** Theoretically yes. You do not want to share shoes with someone that has fungal toenails, but walking around barefoot in the same room or sleeping in the same bed is unlikely to transfer the organism. It is important to realize however, that fungus can spread easily from one nail to the next on the same foot.

**How do we treat this?** There are many ways to treat this condition. Treatment may depend on many factors such as age, pregnancy, other medications, liver and kidney condition etc. It is best to ask your doctor what options are available for you. In general there are four ways to treat this condition:

- 1) **No treatment.** Unlike many other medical concerns you can live with this condition. However for many people this can be a painful condition, and may lead to a bacterial infection and/or ingrown toenails. It is generally recommended that you keep the nails cut short to help reduce the amount of fungal nail.
- 2) **Herbal remedies.** From Tea tree oil to vinegar soaks, to bleaching etc., we have heard it all. Surprisingly, the most effective over the counter approach has been Vick's Vapor Rub. It was written in the Cleveland Plain Dealer in 2000 that a lot of patients were having success with this treatment. With that being said, there is nothing in the Vick's formula that should kill a fungus, but they claim it has worked.
- 3) **Prescription strength topical antifungal.** In general this form of therapy is 40% effective. One type needs to be applied twice daily, and requires a treatment time of 6 to 9 months before you find out if you are in the 40% that it is effective for, or in the 60% that is not. The benefit of this form of treatment is that there really are no side effects. Currently the best topical antifungal agent available is Penlac nail lacquer, an agent that needs to be applied only once daily. Unfortunately many insurances will not cover this medication unless certain criteria are met.
- 4) **Oral antifungal (Lamisil/Sporonox).** Most effective form of treatment. It is

approximately 70% effective. It requires only 3-4 months of therapy. Oral antifungal medications require blood work to help prevent side effects. If blood work is neglected, liver toxicity/failure, thrombocytopenia, kidney problems etc. can occur. In general this medication is safe in the right individual, but blood work is required to keep you safe. If you are taking a medication such as Lipitor, there are other cholesterol lowering agents/statins that can be substituted during your antifungal treatment.

**In General:** A nail culture is mandatory. Nail cultures take approximately 4 weeks to complete. The culture will help to determine which antifungal agent will be best for you. If you should decide to treat this with an oral antifungal, We recommend that you also treat it with a topical agent as well to help improve the efficacy of the treatment. In any case it is also important to treat your shoes. Shoes that can be washed, can be washed them a few times a month. Shoes that cannot be washed, can be cleaned out with Lysol.

Published: 11/17/04