Fungal nail infections

This leaflet provides information about fungal nail infections. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the foot health team.

What is a fungal nail infection?
Fungal nail infections, also known as Onychomycosis, are caused by fungal spores entering the nail. Anyone can get a fungal nail infection but they are more common in older people and those who share communal showers, such as swimmers or athletes. Fungal infections can often spread from the skin (Athlete’s foot) to the nail.

What are the signs and symptoms?
Fungal nail infections can involve part of the nail or the entire nail. Usually the nails look thickened, soft, crumbly and discoloured but are usually painless.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?
Often a diagnosis can be made from the appearance of the nails however your Podiatrist may send a sample of nail for testing. This test may be particularly important if there is no improvement with over-the-counter treatments or you would like to consider oral antifungal treatment.

What treatments are available?
If the fungal infection is only affecting a small portion of the nail then you can try over-the-counter treatments from your local Pharmacy such as Amorolfin 5% nail lacquer. This is applied once or twice weekly to the affected nail(s) after gently filing the nail. Treatment should be continued for 9–12 months. The use of other topical treatments such as tea tree oil is not recommended as these can irritate the skin and cuticles.

If nail lacquers are not effective or the fungal infection is at the base of the nail, you may want to consider oral antifungal treatment. Your podiatrist will need to test that you have a fungal nail infection as there can be side effects to oral antifungal treatment. You will also need to discuss your suitability with your GP.

If you have a particularly stubborn fungal nail infection or you are experiencing a lot of pain from your nail then minor nail surgery is something you can discuss with your podiatrist.

Signs of a successful nail treatment
A healthy nail growing up from the base of the nail is a sign of successful treatment however this can take 2-4 months to appear. Please be aware the nail’s appearance may not be restored to normal, even after successful removal of the fungal infection.

What happens if I do not receive treatment?
You can choose to do nothing, especially if you are not experiencing any symptoms or the appearance does not worry you. The fungal nail appearance may stay the same or it might progress slowly; in some cases the nail can then cause some discomfort; this is something you may then want to discuss with your podiatrist.
Is there anything I can do to help myself?
Sometimes the fungal infection can spread from your skin (Athlete’s foot) to your nails so make sure you keep good foot hygiene and treat Athlete’s foot if present. Please refer to Foot skin and nail care and Athlete’s Foot leaflet for further advice.

Useful sources of information
NHS Website: w: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fungal-nail-infection/

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns, call, t: 020 3049 7900, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.
For emergencies outside these hours contact your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).
For more information on our service including clinic locations please visit,
w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/community-podiatry
For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.
t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. t: 111 w: www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website
Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. w: www.nhs.uk

Was this leaflet useful?
We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or e: patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

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