

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: How to Treat Fungal Nail Infection

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What is onychomycosis?

Onychomycosis is a name for an infection of the nail. It is caused by a fungus. About 10% of adults have this problem. It is more common in toenails than fingernails.

What are signs of a fungal nail infection?

- Thick nails that break easily
- Yellow or white color changes of the nail
- Crumbling nails

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor may be able to tell just by looking at your nails. A sample of your nail may be used to find out the cause of the infection.

What things put me at risk for toenail fungus?

- Moist or sweaty feet
- Older age
- Poor fitting shoes
- Bare feet in public showers
- Other health conditions

What treatments are available?

There are many options to help treat your nails. Your doctor can help you choose the right one for you. It is common to start with a topical treatment. These can include creams or ointments. These can be put directly onto the nail. A benefit of this treatment is that it is usually low in cost. They also have fewer side effects than other medicines. Creams or ointments alone are not always enough to help get rid of the infection.

Tea tree oil is another topical for use on the nails. It has become popular as a natural way to treat nail fungus. It works about as well as the other creams and ointments available. All creams and ointments must be put on your nails for many weeks until your nails get better.

If creams do not help resolve your nail condition, your doctor may prescribe a medicine in a pill form. This medicine does a better job than most creams at getting rid of the fungus for good. This medicine may have other effects on your health. It is important to talk about other health problems you have before you take this pill.

If you have more questions, check out these websites:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001330.htm>

<http://www.skinsight.com/adult/onychomycosis.htm>

Key Words:

Nail fungus

Nail diseases

Onychomycosis

Tea tree oil

Anti-fungals

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