

## PREVENTION

The following tips may help prevent a fungal nail infection from returning:

- Maintain good foot hygiene to prevent infection. Keep feet cool and dry where possible.
- Replace old footwear and socks as these could harbour bacteria.
- Wear well fitting shoes made from natural or breathable materials.
- Wear footwear such as flip-flops when around shower areas and in locker rooms.
- Do not share towels, nail clippers, footwear or socks.
- Try to avoid injury/trauma to the nails which may increase the risk of fungal infection.
- Avoid prolonged use of nail varnish and cosmetic nails as these can aggravate the condition.

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To find out more about accessible formats contact:

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Further patient information leaflets are available online on our website [www.nhsfife.org/](http://www.nhsfife.org/)

Fife Council and NHS Fife are supporting the people of Fife together through Fife's Health and Social Care Partnership.

[www.fifehealthandsocialcare.org](http://www.fifehealthandsocialcare.org)



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## PODIATRY DEPARTMENT



## Fungal Nail Infection (Onychomycosis)

## WHAT IS A FUNGAL NAIL?

A fungal nail infection affects the hard material (keratin) that makes up the outer layer of the nail. The infection usually starts at the tip of the nail (free edge) then spreads downwards to the base. Eventually the whole nail may be involved.

The infection develops slowly and may cause the nail to become discoloured, thickened and sometimes misshapen.

Most fungal nail infections are caused by the same fungus that causes athlete's foot.

## CAUSE

Several factors may increase the risk of a fungal nail infection -

- Wearing shoes that cause feet to become hot and sweaty.
- Certain health conditions such as poor circulation, psoriasis or diabetes.
- Being in a hot or humid environment for prolonged periods of time.
- Walking barefoot around wet communal areas such as showers, gym and pools.
- Trauma or damage to the nail.
- Athlete's Foot – especially if long-standing, or untreated.

- Prolonged use of Nail varnish and cosmetic nails
- Smoking

## SYMPTOMS

A fungal nail may not cause any obvious symptoms initially however they can display the following signs -

- Often the infection occurs in one nail, but several can become involved.
- At first the infection is usually painless, although the nail may look unsightly.
- The infected area may appear white or yellowish and become thickened or soft and crumbly.
- The skin next to the affected nail may be inflamed or scaly.
- In some cases, walking may become uncomfortable or even painful. The pain is likely to be from the thickened nails and footwear, rather than the actual infection itself.

## TREATMENT

If mild or causing no symptoms, treatment isn't always necessary.

If treatment is required - your G.P. or Podiatrist may send a nail sample away to determine the exact cause of infection and then decide on treatment choice.

Treatments include: Anti fungal Nail Lacquer paints and/or tablets. Both of these medicines may cause side effects in some people, so always check with your GP or Pharmacist before commencing treatment.

It is important to use medication only as directed so that the best outcome can be achieved.

A new healthy nail growing from the base means that the treatment is working. The new nail can take up to 12 months to grow in again. However, the nail may never grow back normal.

Nail surgery is also an option if other treatments have failed, although there is no absolute guarantee that part of the nail will not re-grow.