Thumbs down to nail injuries [1]

Dear Alice,

I slammed my thumb in a car door and now the nail is about to fall off. I can see my flesh from underneath my nail and it looks all wrinkled and not very healthy. I am afraid that it won't grow back.

Is the skin going to hurt once the nail falls off?

Please let me know.

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader

Ouch! Sounds like your thumb really got nailed! Even though your injury might look painful, new skin should grow over the nail bed (the flesh under where your nail used to be) in about a week. The pain should be gone once this happens, but it's a good idea to keep an eye out for signs of infection. These symptoms may include heat, redness, swelling, tenderness, pain, or drainage of pus or pus-like fluid in the area.

To protect yourself from infection:

- Soak your thumb in a solution of one teaspoon of salt to four cups of warm water for 20 minutes, two to three times a day, during the first few days after the injury.
- Carefully dry it off, and apply an antibiotic ointment.
- Cover the nail bed with an adhesive bandage.

It might also be a good idea to speak with a health care provider about your injury, if you haven't already. Besides infection, s/he can check to make sure that no bones were broken or fractured, look for bruising, and see if you need a tetanus shot. This last part is crucial since tetanus can be deadly. In addition, if you suffer from diabetes, poor circulation, or any condition that may affect your body's ability to heal, you need to seek professional medical help.

Most likely, your nail will grow back on its own in about six to eight weeks, but it can take as long as six months. There is also a chance that it may be permanently deformed with grooves
or dents. Again, a health care provider will be able to give you more details on how your thumb will heal and how to make sure that every step of the recovery process goes smoothly.

Good luck and be careful,

Alice!

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Published date:
Feb 16, 2007
Last reviewed on:
Jun 12, 2015