Fingernails fray and chip all the time

Dear Alice,

My fingernails fray and chip all the time. I have tried many different nail polishes and nail hardener but nothing helps. I've been trying to grow my nails for the past year and I just can't seem to get them to grow. My mother and older sister don't have any problems getting their nails to grow. Please give me some tips on how to make my nails grow stronger and fast.

Answer

Dear Reader,

There's not much research on how to make your nails grow faster and stronger if you are an otherwise healthy individual. What is known is that pregnancy, for example, can accelerate nail growth, while aging can slow down the process. Maintaining a varied and balanced diet and keeping your nails and body healthy in general, however, can keep nail growth from slowing down. If your nails do fray and chip, there are lots of things you can do to allow them to grow and stay strong and healthy.

To help maintain or restore the health of your nails, you may want to think about trying some or all of the following:

- **Wearing rubber gloves** to protect your nails and skin when washing dishes or using household products containing any chemicals.
- **Limiting your application of nail polish remover** to about once per week and switching to a remover that's acetone-free.
- **Regularly moisturizing your fingernails** and surrounding skin with lotions, creams or oils may also help. It's recommended that you soak your nails in a bowl of vegetable, olive, or tea-tree oil and then pat them dry. You may even want to wear cotton gloves while you sleep to help keep your nails properly moisturized.
- **Keeping your nails short** is actually a great way to keep them healthy?the longer they are the more likely they are to break or become damaged. It's recommended that after clipping your nails, you file them down with an emery board to keep the ends healthy and the whole nail strong.

In terms of nutrition, experts suggest that you eat a varied and well-balanced diet that includes fresh fruits and veggies, whole grains, legumes (beans, peas, lentils, and soy products), seeds, nuts, low-or non-fat dairy, fish, and lean meats. Maintaining a varied and healthy diet can help ensure that your nails get all the nutrients they need to grow. Specifically, experts
believe that zinc, calcium, and especially biotin are critical to nail health, appearance and strength. Some great sources for biotin are:

- Yeast
- Whole grains and cereals
- Soybeans
- Cauliflower
- Lentils
- Milk
- Peanut butter
- Egg yolks
- Fish
- Liver and other organ meats

You can also take a multivitamin to help make sure you get all the nutrients you need for healthier nails. There are a variety of factors that could be causing you to have trouble growing your nails. It's possible that your fingernails are chipping and fraying because of:

- **Contact with harsh chemicals:** Household cleaning products, strong soaps, detergents, and even nail polishes and nail polish removers can dry, irritate, and weaken nails, making them susceptible to breakage, especially with those who are sensitive or allergic to certain ingredients in these products.
- **Nutritional dietary needs:** You may not be getting enough iron, calcium, zinc, protein, and vitamins B complex and C in your diet.
- **Physical damage:** It's also possible that your nails are having trouble growing because they are being broken or cracked by mechanical stress. Biting or picking at your nails as well as using them as tools to poke, pick, or pry things can cause damage that prevents them from growing at a normal pace.

The appearance of your nails can change if you have a skin disease, such as psoriasis or fungal infections. Injuries, excessive contact with water, and other conditions also have the potential to change the appearance of your nails.

If the condition of your fingernails doesn't improve over time, or if you're concerned about any unusual deformities, such as discoloration, grooves/ridges, dents, white spots, and changes in thickness, you may want to consider speaking with a health care provider or dermatologist for evaluation and treatment. You can also talk to her/him about any other questions or concerns you have about your nails or health in general.

Alice!

Category:
- General Health [2]
- Aches, Pains & Other Ailments [3]

**Related questions**

- Nail health [4]
- Hung up over painful hangnail [5]
- Fingernails as health indicator [6]
- Why is my toenail falling off? [7]