Hung up over painful hangnail

Dear Alice,

I have a hang nail that has caused my finger to become very sore and swollen. What should I do for it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Flaps of skin that have separated from around the fingernail or cuticle referred to as hangnails are common, but can be more than annoying! They can be painful, bleed, and sometimes they can become infected. But fear not, there are several things you might try to fix your flayed finger!

If you get a hangnail, it's recommended that you avoid pulling or biting it off. Instead, remove the excess skin with nail clippers or nail scissors. To avoid infection, make sure to wash your hands regularly. You mentioned that your hangnail is very sore and swollen — this could be a sign of infection. It's wise to apply some over-the-counter antibacterial ointment or cream (after you clean and dry your hands) and bandage your finger to treat any possible infection and help it heal.

Now that you've experienced how much of a nuisance hangnails can be, you might also be wondering how you can prevent these frustrating flaps of skin in the first place. Some strategies to consider include:

- Using moisturizer on your hands, fingers, nails, and cuticles to avoid dry skin.
- Avoiding biting or picking your nails.
- If your hands are exposed to water, cleansers, or other chemicals often, wearing a pair of rubber or plastic gloves to protect the skin on your hands.
- Using recommended techniques to keep your nails healthy and strong.

If you notice that your hangnail isn't healing or becomes more painful, you may want to reach out to your health care provider or a dermatologist. Here's to hoping that you can soon hang that hangnail out to dry!

Alice!
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