Dear Alice,

The nail on my toe seems to have cut deeply into the skin and is bothering me. I also seem to have the signs of fungus (colored nail). What non-surgical methods exist to cure these?

Regards,

B.

Answer

Dear B,

That must be toe-tally painful! What you describe sounds like it may be an ingrown toenail when your toenail grows in a way that the edge presses against its adjacent skin, causing pain and discomfort. Common causes of ingrown toenails include genetics, shoes that are too tight, injuring your toe, or cutting your toenails too short or not straight across. The coloring your describing may be due to infection, but toenail fungus causes discoloration as well (for more information on this, check out [Toenail fungus](https://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/faq/toenail-fungus) in the Go Ask Alice! archives). After the nail grows inward, it's possible for an infection to occur. This may lead to some serious additional pain, as you mentioned. However, there are steps you might take to treat your toe and prevent future ingrown toenails.

An ingrown toenail *without an infection* may be treated at home using the following steps:

- Soften the nail by soaking the toe in warm water, possibly with Epsom salts.
- Clip the affected, using clean nail clippers, area once softened.
- Apply antibiotic ointment to the toe.
- Place a bandage on top of the infected area.
- Wear shoes with lots of room at the top and take over-the-counter painkillers if needed.

*Adapted from The Cleveland Clinic* [3] and *Mayo Clinic* [4]

However, if your toe seems to be infected, it may be best to contact a podiatrist or another health care provider in order to avoid complications arising. They can recommend the most appropriate treatment for your situation.

To put your best foot forward in the future, try cutting your toenails straight across without
trimming too close and cutting into, or damaging, the skin at the corners of the nail. Additionally, try to avoid tearing the nail; cut it neatly with scissors or nail clippers. Ingrown toenails are likely to recur, so preventative measures can help to stave off pain in the future.

Ingrown toenails and fungal infections are no fun. Practicing good nail hygiene and taking care of your feet may help you from toeing the line between healthy and painful digits!

Alice!
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