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GS16lite Surgery for Ingrowing Toenail (adult)

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This document will give you information about surgery for an ingrowing toenail. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is an ingrowing toenail?

An ingrowing toenail happens when the toenail grows into the skin around it (see figure 1). The skin can get damaged, causing infection and pain. The problem usually happens to the big toe.

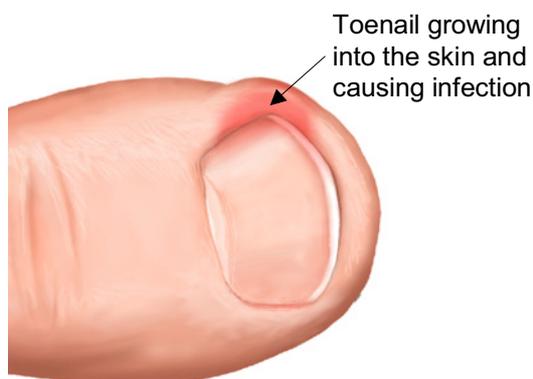


Figure 1
Ingrowing toenail

The most common cause of an ingrowing toenail is not cutting your toenails properly. The problem often runs in families as a common cause is having toenails that do not grow straight. Wearing shoes that do not have enough width to fit the toes in their natural position can also cause an ingrowing toenail.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Removing the ingrowing toenail or part of the toenail should take away the infection and pain.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Try to cut your toenails straight across and do not leave sharp edges.

Wear shoes that fit the shape of your feet comfortably.

Your GP or podiatrist may be able to push the skin away from the ingrowing toenail or cut away the piece of nail that has grown into the skin.

What does the operation involve?

Surgery for an ingrowing toenail is usually performed under a local anaesthetic.

The operation usually takes about ten minutes and may involve nail avulsion (removing the whole toenail), wedge excision (removing part of the nail), nail-bed ablation (removing part of or the whole nail and then applying a chemical or an electric current to the area of tissue that the nail grows from), and Zadek's procedure (removing the whole nail and then cutting away the area of tissue that the nail grows from).

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Unsightly scarring

2 Specific complications

- Infection of the surgical site (wound)

How soon will I recover?

After a short while you will be able to go home.

For the first few days you will need to spend most of the time with your leg raised up so that the swelling settles. After that, you can usually start to be a little more active.

For the first two weeks you should not play sports or do other strenuous activities. You should keep the dressing dry.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Try to cut your toenails straight across and do not leave sharp edges. Wear shoes that fit the shape of your feet comfortably.

An ingrowing toenail can happen again.

Summary

Surgery to remove an ingrowing toenail can take away infection and pain.

Acknowledgements

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