



Getting Help for Nail Changes

Nail changes are different problems that can happen to fingernails, toenails, or both. Nails are normally present on each finger and toe.

Nails are made up of:

- The nail plate (the hardest part of the nail and the part that can be seen)
- The nail bed (tissue that lies underneath the nail plate).

What causes nail changes?

Some types of cancer and cancer treatments can cause changes to the nails. Depending on what is causing them, you might notice differences in how they look, feel, and work. Nail changes can be temporary or may last.

What common nail changes should I watch for?

- Dark areas under the nail, which look like bruises, and are usually along the bottom edge of the nail
- Small, thin cracks or deep cuts or tears in the fingertips, nail plate, or nail bed (fissures), which can sometimes be painful
- Small red lines in the nails that are tiny areas of bleeding under the nail plate (hemorrhages)
- Darkening of the skin around the nail, or on the nail itself (color changes)
- Redness, and sometimes swelling of the nail bed and surrounding finger or toe, which may be a sign of infection of pain (inflammation)
- Lifting of the nail plate, which can make the nail likely to fall off, and become a place infection could easily happen
- Complete loss of the nail plate, which is usually temporary but can be painful and increase the risk of infection
- Different looking ridges or colored lines in the nail plate

What you can do to prevent or control nail changes

- Check your hands and feet every day to look for changes in your nails.
- Avoid injuries to your nails as much as possible.
- Use a water-soluble nail coating, like nail polish, on nails that have ridges, are delicate, or are splitting. Nail lacquer can strengthen and protect your nails.
- Keep your nails trimmed short. Short nails are less likely to break or get caught.
- Keep your nails clean to avoid infections.
- Wear gloves to protect your nails when putting them in water (such as washing dishes), gardening, or cleaning.
- Ask your doctor if it's OK to get professional manicures while you are getting treatment for cancer.
- Wear loose-fitting shoes.
- Avoid pressure to your nail beds (both fingers and toes).
- If your doctor prescribes medicine to treat your nail changes, take it as prescribed.
- Tell your doctor about any changes in your nails. If you have pain or infection with your nail changes, talk to your health care team before trying any home remedies.

Talk to your health care team

Talk to your health care team about your cancer and cancer treatment, what nail changes you can expect, and how you can manage them. Tell them as soon as you notice any expected or unexpected changes to your nails. If you get medicine to treat your nail changes, be sure to tell your doctor how the medication is working for you or if new problems come up.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **www.cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

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