

What to Do for Nail Changes

Nail changes can happen to fingernails, toenails, or both. These changes may affect how your nails look, feel, and work. The changes can be temporary or may last.



What causes nail changes in people with cancer?

Nail changes can happen for many reasons. They may occur from:

- Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and targeted drug therapy
- Some cancers, such as skin cancer
- Medicines or treatments for other health conditions



What are some common nail changes?

Nail changes can affect the nail plate (the hardest part of the nail and the part that can be seen) and the nail bed (tissue underneath the nail plate). Some common nail changes include:

- Dark areas under the nail, which look like bruises, and are most often seen along the cuticle (bottom edge of the nail)
- Small, thin cracks or deep cuts or tears in the fingertip, nail plate, or nail bed, which can be painful
- Small red lines that are tiny areas of bleeding under the nail plate
- Darkening of the skin around the nail, or on the nail itself (color changes)
- Redness, and sometimes swelling of the nail bed and skin around the finger or toe, which may be a sign of infection and can be painful
- Lifting of the nail plate, which can increase the risk of infection and that the nail will fall off
- Complete loss of the nail plate, which can be painful and increase the risk of infection until the nail grows back
- Ridges or colored lines in the nail plate, which will grow out after treatment ends



How are nail changes treated?

Not all nail changes need to be treated. Treatment depends on what signs or symptoms you're having. For example, medicines may be used to treat pain or an infection.



What can you do to help prevent or manage 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.
- Keep your nails trimmed short. Short nails are less likely to break or get caught.
- Keep your nails clean to help avoid infections.
- Wear gloves to help protect your nails when putting them in water (such as washing dishes), gardening, or cleaning.
- Avoid manicures and pedicures.
- Wear loose-fitting shoes.
- Avoid pressure to your nail beds (both fingers and toes).
- Ask your cancer care team about any home remedies before trying them.



When to talk with your cancer care team

Ask your cancer care team if your treatment is likely to cause nail changes. Ask what kind of changes to watch for and how to manage them. Let your cancer care team know if you have any nail changes, swelling, redness, or pain around your nail.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/nailchanges or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.