

FUNGAL NAIL INFECTION (ONYCHOMYCOSIS)

Onychomycosis is a fungal infection of the nails and is one of the most common dermatological conditions, possibly affecting up to 10% of the population. Fungal nail infections usually affect your toenails, but you can get them on your fingernails too.

Symptoms

Fungal nail infections sometimes start at the edge of the nail. Many people would have no symptoms apart from a change in appearance of the nail characterised by nail thickening and discolouration.

The nail becomes brittle, and pieces can break off. Sometimes the whole nail lifts off. This can cause pain and swelling in the skin around the nail

Risk factors

Psoriasis, diabetes, peripheral artery disease, immunocompromised, repeated nail trauma, and occlusive footwear.

Treatment

Fungal nail infection can be treated over the counter using AMOROLFINE Nail Lacquer for 6 months for fingernails, or 9-12 months for toenails. Success rate with the topical Amorolfine is 40-55%.

Oral antifungal treatment, such as terbinafine tablets, might be suitable. Systemic terbinafine is the most effective agent in dermatophyte onychomycosis but there is still only a 70-80% success rate. Treatment with oral antifungals should only be prescribed when absolutely necessary as they all have the potential to cause serious side effects e.g. liver failure, but this is rare - 1 in 50,000-120,000 patients. If liver failure occurs, it does so in the first 6 weeks of taking terbinafine.

A firm diagnosis should always be made before initiating drug treatment. A specimen of the infected nail should be assessed for mycology. Drug therapy should only be initiated if infection is confirmed by microscopy and/or culture.

Duration of treatment with oral terbinafine

Fingernails: 6 weeks to 3 months

Toenails: 3 months (may need longer)

Monitoring required:

Liver function blood test before treatment and 4-6 weeks after treatment.

Possible side effects of oral terbinafine

- GI: nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, indigestion, abdominal pain
- Liver abnormalities (liver inflammation or jaundice)
- Blood disorders: low white cell count (cells which fight infection) or platelets (which help the blood to clot)
- Other side effects include: dizziness, malaise, rash, urticaria, pruritis, taste disturbance, headache

Report any signs or symptoms suggestive of liver dysfunction such as fever, unexplained persistent nausea, decreased appetite, jaundice, vomiting, fatigue, right upper abdominal pain, dark urine, or pale stools. Patients with these symptoms should discontinue taking terbinafine and the patient's liver function should be immediately evaluated.

Preventing fungal nail infection

Fungal nail infections develop when your feet are constantly warm and damp. You're more likely to get an infection if you wear trainers for a long time and have hot, sweaty feet.

To prevent fungal nail infections:

Do

- Treat athlete's foot as soon as possible to avoid it spreading to nails
- Keep your feet clean and dry
- Wear clean socks every day
- Wear flip-flops in showers at the gym or pool
- Throw out old shoes keep nails short

Don't

- Do not wear shoes that make your feet hot and sweaty
- Do not share towels
- Do not wear other people's shoes
- Do not share nail clippers or scissors