

Caring for your Toenails



*A guide to help you to
care for your toenails.*

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Swan Hill
District Health
my hospital

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External Help

Who can I pay to cut my toenails?

Private Podiatrists will cut toenails. They will perform a medical assessment of your foot health before cutting nails.

Most beauty salons will cut toenails as well as provide pedicures.

Some of the Pharmacies have people who are specially trained to cut toenails.

There are some private nail cutting businesses. Check to make sure they have completed a recognised course and have insurance.

Make sure toenail clippers and files have been sterilised in an autoclave between different people

Why can't I get my nails cut at the hospital?

In line with prioritising Podiatry services for management of clients who are at risk of developing foot complications, the hospital is unable to offer ongoing service to clients who only require toenail cutting.

The role of the public Podiatrist is to:

- Educate people about foot care and diseases that affect the feet.
- Encourage people to self manage their own foot health.
- Prevent foot and leg amputations.
- Treat and prevent foot ulcers.
- Provide treatments that reduce pain and prevent long term problems.

What happens if I have a problem?

The Podiatrists at the hospital are happy to see you if you have a NEW problem. They can assess, treat and provide solutions to help resolve your foot problem. However, if you have been assessed as not being eligible for nail care, they will not be able to provide nail care while they are treating new problems.

Introduction

Toenail care is something we all have to do.

Some people find it difficult to care for their own nails. Some of the reasons for this include:

- Unable to reach feet:
 - Due to breathing problems
 - Due to a large tummy
 - Due to a back problem
- Hands not strong enough to cut nails
- Not able to see feet
- Nails too hard
- Nails that have changed shape

Other people are unsure if they are caring for their nails correctly, or are worried about cutting themselves or getting an infection.

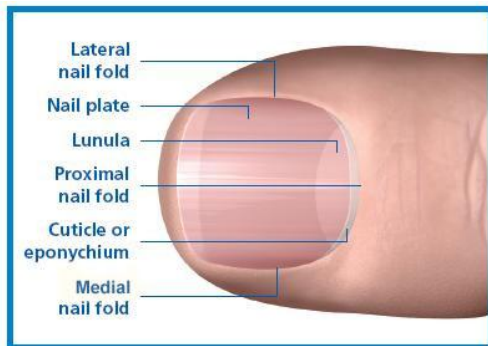
This brochure provides some suggestions for how you can manage your own nails or services you can access for nail care.

Description/Problems

Why do we have toenails?

Toenails protect our toes from damage when we walk barefoot.

Anatomy of a toenail



Toenails are usually 1-3mm thick.

A big toenail takes 12 months to grow from the bottom to the top.

Little toenails take about 9 months to grow.

Toenails usually have a gentle curve from left to right and top to bottom.

Nails grow more slowly when you get older, in winter and if you have poor blood supply to your feet.

What problems can toenails develop?

Nails can develop many problems. Some common ones are:

White Spots – These are usually due to trauma.

Thick Nails – When toenails are damaged they can thicken to more than 5mm.

Fungal toenail – This is caused by a fungus growing in the nail.

Ingrowing toenail – This occurs when a spike of nail digs into the skin – the nail becomes red, painful and pus comes out from under the nail.

Swan Hill District Health Service

Can I get my toenails cut at Swan Hill District Health?

- The Podiatrists at the hospital can see you for 1 or 2 visits to assess your feet and provide advice on how to manage your toenails.
- During this visit they will review your medical conditions and the medication you are taking. They will examine the amount of feeling in your feet and assess how good the blood supply to the feet is. They will assess your feet for bunions and hammer toes.
- They will discuss with you the problems they find with your feet and make suggestions for how to care for your feet.
- They can thin very thick toenails to make them easier for you or your family to manage.
- On going toenail care for normal nails is not available at Swan Hill District Health
- Periodic nail care (usually 3 times a year) may be available to some clients who have abnormal nails.
- Appointments for toenail assessments & advice are dependent on availability of Podiatrists.

What is an abnormal nail?



Diabetes

I have Diabetes, can I care for my own nails?

Most people who have Diabetes are perfectly safe to care for their own nails.

If you are worried about getting an infection it is better to file nails than cut them.

If you do accidentally cut yourself when cutting your nails:

Wash the area well with soap and water.

Apply some antiseptic.

Cover the toe well with a band aid.

Put a new sticking plaster and more antiseptic on each day until it is healed.

Keep an eye on it:

If it is not healed in 4 days contact your GP or the Podiatrist.

If it gets very red, pus starts coming out, starts smelling, or gets very sore contact your GP or the Podiatrist.

People with Diabetes need to have their feet checked by a Podiatrist every year.

Diabetes can affect the ability to feel damage to feet and can change the amount of blood getting to the feet. If this has happened to you, the Podiatrist will give you extra things to do to care for your feet to help keep them healthy. The Podiatrist will also see you more often.

Care

How can I care for my toenails?

Just like our fingernails, toenails can be cut or filed. Filing your toenails is a great way to care for them.

How long should our toenails be?

Many people keep their nails too short.

Nails only need to be cut:

If they are causing discomfort.

When they are catching in socks / stockings.

When there is more than 3mm of white visible at the top of the toe.

Some people are very comfortable with nails that are longer than this.

After your nails have been cared for you should still have about 1mm of white visible.

When do I need to care for my toenails?

Filing toenails

A little bit often works best.

Some people like to file them for about a minute every day.

Other people find that spending 5 minutes once a week is ideal.

Cutting toenails

For most people this needs to be done about every 6-8 weeks.

How should toenails be cut?

Always cut your toenails so you can clearly see the corner of the nail. Cutting your toenails straight across means you always achieve this.

If your toenails dig into the sides of the other toes they should be cut so they follow the natural line of the toe – where the pink joins the white.

You can slightly round the corners of the nails with a nail file to help stop them digging into the other toes.

Never cut down into the side of the nail (lateral nail fold – see page 4). People who cut into the sides of their toenails often leave a little piece of nail behind that causes an ingrown toenail.

Check that there is no skin caught up in the end of the clippers before you close the clippers.

Cut small amounts of nail away at a time. Do not try to cut the nail in one piece.

Nail care tips

- Use the right tool for the job.
- Always perform nail care on freshly washed feet.
- Make sure you have plenty of lighting.
- Perform nail care in the easiest position for you.

How to file nails

Choosing a nail file:

You can use a metal file or a sandpaper file. Choose a long wide file with coarse grain.

Where can I buy a nail file from?

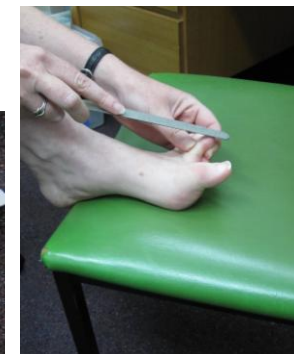
The pharmacy may be able to sell you one. The Podiatry department sells long or short wooden files. Some people buy a fine metal or woodwork file from a hardware shop.

Keeping my file clean:

Ideally each person has their own file. If it is a metal file it can be washed in soap and water. Make sure it dries well or it will rust.

How do I file my toenails?

File downwards using long strokes. You can round off corners if you like.



What are the best nail clippers to buy?

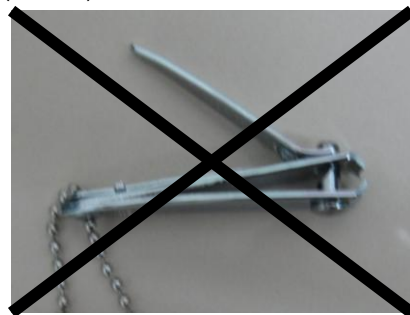
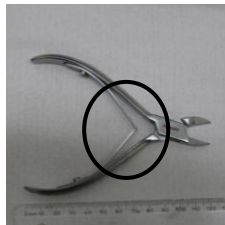
A good quality pair of nail clippers costs at least \$20. Professional Nail clippers cost over \$100. See the pharmacy to buy good quality nail clippers.

Longer Nail clippers are easier to use than short ones. 14 – 15cm is a good length.

Clippers with two hinges are easier to use than clippers with one hinge.

Clippers with a barrel spring (left) are easier to use than leaf springs (right).

Don't use this style of clipper to cut your nails. (Below)

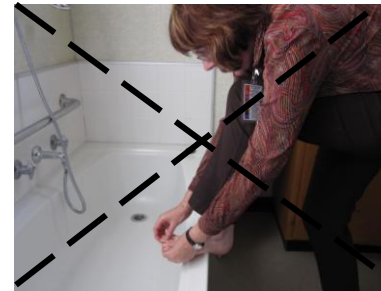


It is hard to cut small amounts of nail at a time and nails often break if you use this style of cutter. These clippers are easy to accidentally cut into the skin. Also they are harder to use.

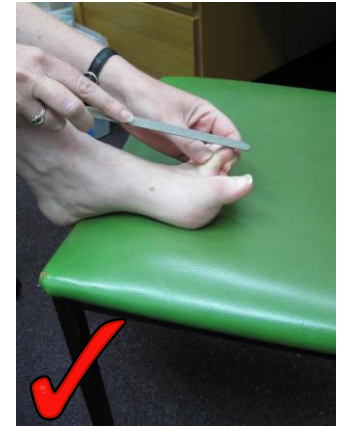
Your Comfort

What is the best position for me to be in to care for my nails?

Putting your foot up on a chair is easier than bending down.



Standing with your foot on the bath is dangerous if you are at risk of falling over.



Sitting on a bed or sitting down and putting your foot up on another chair are two good positions to care for your own toenails.

These are especially good if you get breathless or are uncomfortable bending over.

Contents

I have nail fungus, can I spread it to the other nails?

Cut or file the other toenails first and then the infected nails. Clean your clippers / nail file well after you finish. A Podiatrist can provide you with advice on how to treat fungal nails. Treatment takes a long time and often the fungus is difficult to get rid of.

I can't see to cut my nails, what should I do?

Ask someone else to care for your nails or file them instead of cutting.

I can't reach my nails, what should I do?

Use a long handled nail file (see page 10) or ask someone else to care for your nails.

Should I soak my nails before cutting them?

Some people like to soak their nails but it is not necessary. If you chose to soak them don't soak them for longer than 15 minutes.

I get breathless when I bend over to cut my nails, what should I do?

Try filing your nails with a long handled file. See page 11. People who uses inhalers because they get breathless often find it useful to do their nails 30 minutes after taking their inhalers. Using a different position to care for your nails can also work. You could also stagger the task – only cut 1-2 nails per day.

External Help

My nails are too hard to cut

My hands are not strong enough to cut my nails

- File your nails instead of cutting them.
- Ask a partner / older child / relative / friend to help you care for your nails.
- Choose different equipment – see page 9.
- Use longer clippers.
- Hold the clippers further from the hinge.
- Pay someone else to cut them – see page 14.



An Occupational Therapist can provide advice on modified equipment such as thicker handles.

A Physiotherapist can provide strengthening exercises for your hands. This may be useful if you are having trouble with opening jars.