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Ingrown Toenail

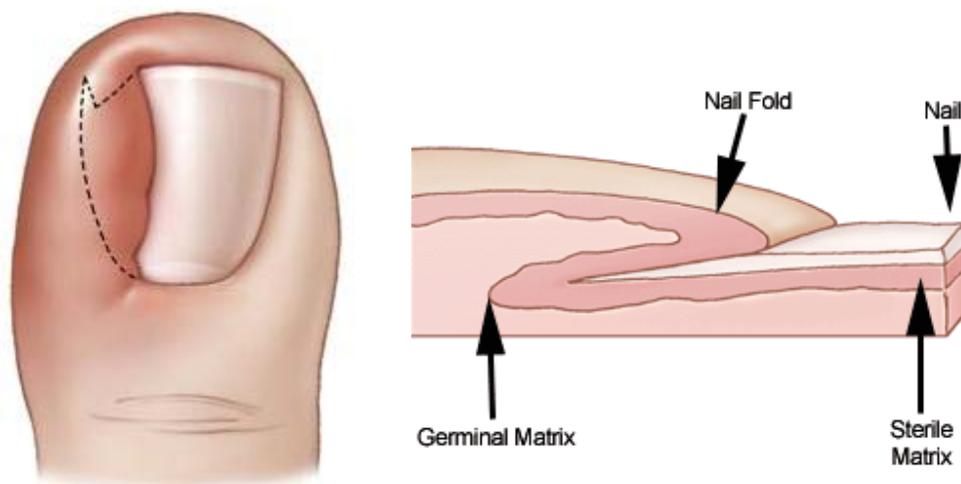


Figure 1: Ingrown toenail

Ingrown toenail is a condition that most commonly affects the big toe. This condition usually results when pressure from improper shoe wear and improper care of the toenails. This leads to pain and overgrowth of the tissue at the side of the nail.

How does a toenail normally grow?

The toenail is produced by the nail's germinal matrix and grows forward to the end of the toe. The area under the nail that attaches the nail to the toe is called the sterile matrix. The sterile matrix doesn't produce the nail. On either side of the nail is an area called the nail groove, where the skin of the toe meets the nail matrix and the edge of the toenail.

How does the problem develop?

The chronic pressure of the nail edge rubbing against the nail groove causes irritation and swelling of the surrounding skin. Eventually, an infection can occur in the area, leading to even more pain and swelling. Improper trimming of the toenail can also cause problems. If the corner of the toenail is not allowed to grow out past the skin at the end of the nail groove, it may dig into the skin. This makes the pressure from the shoe even more painful.

What does an ingrown toenail feel like?

The primary symptom of an ingrown toenail is pain. The toe is red and painful to the touch, and it can be difficult to wear shoes. If infection is present, pus may drain from the area as well.

What can be done for the condition?

Nonsurgical Treatment

Pressure on the toe should be reduced to a minimum with sandals. The temptation to trim the corner of the toenail off should be avoided.

The goal of nonsurgical treatment is to allow the toenail to grow out to the end of the toe beyond the nail groove.

Intermittent soaks in a warm saline solution may be suggested.

If the area is infected, antibiotics may be necessary

Shoes should be found that do not put too much pressure on the big toe.

Surgery

If the condition has resulted in permanent hypertrophy of the tissue surrounding the nail margin, surgery may be required to treat the condition.

1. Wedge Resection

In this procedure, a wedge of tissue is removed and the healing process allows the nail groove to reform itself.

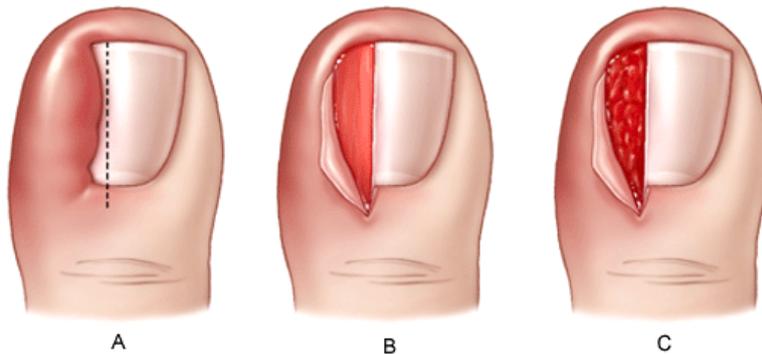
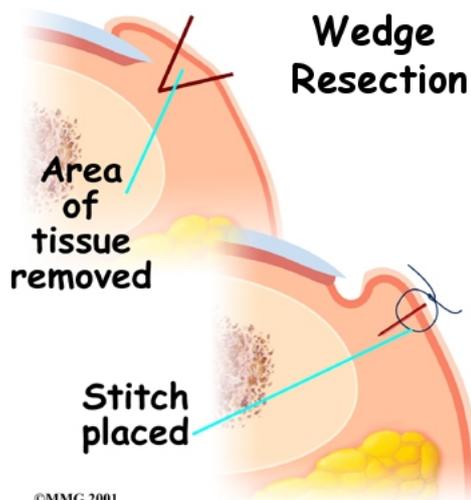


Figure 3: A: Infected toenail; B: Toenail partially removed; C: Toenail surgery



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Partial Nail and Matrix Removal

More severe cases may require removal of a portion of the toenail and the germinal matrix that produces that portion of the nail.

2. Nail and Matrix Ablation

Finally, in cases of severe deformity, the entire or partial nail and its germinal matrix may need to be removed. This is called a complete or partial nail ablation. No new toenail will grow back. This should be done only as last resort.



These procedures can usually be done in your doctor's office under local anesthetic.

Rehabilitation

It will take several weeks before the tissues are healed.

You will probably wear a bandage or dressing for about a week following the procedure.

Soaking the toe in warm salt water each day for the first week after surgery.