

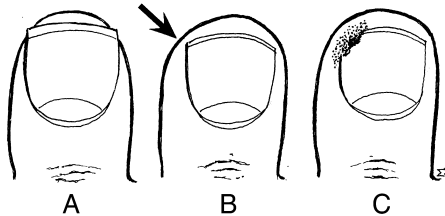
## △ GENERAL INFORMATION

An ingrown toenail can produce a lot of pain. Actually, it is *not* the toenail growing *in*; the nail just grows straight ahead as it should. Instead, it's the flesh that is *pushed in front* of the growing toenail.

The toenail should be allowed to grow as in Figure 1A. It should *not* be cut as in Figure 1B. Otherwise, the flesh is pushed in front of the sharp edge of the toenail. The toenail then grows, and pretty soon it simply cuts into the flesh, which gets irritated and infected (Fig. 1C). This is a condition that is called *ingrown toenail*.

Some of the things that make this happen are the following:

- Cutting the nail too short (arrow in B) so that the flesh is in front of the growing nail at the sides of the toe.
- Wearing pointed shoes that are too snug at the toes. The shoe pushes the flesh of the big toe into the sharp edge of the growing toenail.
- Feet that are too warm and sweaty, making the skin softer. It then is easier for the irritated toe to become infected.
- Trauma from kicking or bumping.



**Figure 1.** The degree of inflammation and infection associated with an ingrown toenail can vary considerably. However, the principles of treatment remain the same.

## COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Any toe can be involved, but most commonly it is the tip of the big toe.

## DIAGNOSIS

- Usually the diagnosis can be made by taking a detailed history and thoroughly examining the toe.

## ○ TREATMENT

- **Medical:** If the condition is seen and treated early, you can try to keep the flesh away from the sharp cutting corner of the toenail until the toenail can grow over the flesh. For this you will need a fine tweezer, a little cotton, and some ordinary rubbing alcohol.
  - If you like, take some over-the-counter pain medicine before you start.
  - Take a tiny bit of cotton and dip it in the alcohol.
  - Very gently push the cotton under the edge of the

sharp cutting edge of the toenail. Just leave it there. At first, this may seem impossible, but with patience, it can be done. Perhaps the doctor can do it for you the first time. This will shrink the tissue a bit and make it easier to do it again the next day.

- Repeat this every day until the nail grows *over* the skin of the toe, as it should.
- **Surgical:** If the condition is too advanced for the above treatment, then a portion of the toenail needs to be removed so that it does not continue to dig into the flesh (see Fig. 1C).

## PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION

- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the operation.

## □ OPERATION

- The front part of the foot will be painted with an antiseptic solution and draped.
- A very fine, short needle will be used to inject an anesthetic into the nerves of the toe. This will make the entire toe numb.
- The involved side of the toenail will be removed so that all of the infected soft tissue can heal. The toenail will slowly heal back to the shape it was before, but this time it will grow *over* the tissue.
- You should be able to go home directly after the operation.
- Arrangements will be made for your medicine, follow-up office visit, and first dressing change.

## POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- Walk about as you wish, but at the beginning you will need some type of open-toed shoe. It will hurt too much to wear a regular shoe. Besides, there will be a large bandage on the toe, and it will not fit inside a shoe with a closed toe.
- Take medicine as prescribed for your pain.
- There will be less pain if every hour or two you lie down with the leg elevated on a pillow.
- The first dressing will be changed at the doctor's office. At that time, you will be shown how to change it yourself.
- After the first dressing change, you can take a shower or bath with the dressing in place. After you dry yourself, remove the wet dressing (it will come off more easily when wet) and replace it with a new one.

## ☞ CALL OUR OFFICE IF

- The toe becomes red and more swollen than before the operation.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.