



Dr. Jay T. Hassenfratz
Podiatric Medicine
1026 Union Road
West Seneca, New York 14224
(716) 712-0851

Onychomycosis/Fungal Toenails

What is it? Similar to getting a bacterial infection of your toenails, except that is caused by a fungus.

Why me? Fungal infections affect all ages, sexes and races. There may be many factors that predispose you to a fungal infection such as age, coexisting medical conditions such as diabetes, or an autoimmune disease, stress, medications, fatigue etc. Fungus thrives in warm, moist environments, and your shoes offer such a location.

Is it contagious? Theoretically yes. You do not want to share shoes with someone that has fungal toenails, but walking around barefoot in the same room or sleeping in the same bed is unlikely to transfer the organism. It is important to realize, however, that fungus can spread easily from one nail to the next on the same foot.

How do we treat it? There are many ways to treat this condition. Recommendations depend on many factors such as age, pregnancy, other medications, liver and kidney condition etc. In general, the following are potential ways to treat this condition:

- 1) No treatment:** Unlike many other medical conditions, you live with this. However for many people this can be a painful condition, and may lead to a bacterial infection and/or ingrown toenails. It is generally recommended that you keep nails cut short to help reduce the amount of fungal nail.
- 2) Herbal remedies:** From Tea tree oil to vinegar soaks, to bleaching etc., we have heard it all. One method is a 50:50 mixture of Listerine and cider vinegar
- 3) Prescription strength topical antifungal:** This therapy is 40% effective. One type needs to be applied twice daily, and requires 6 to 9 months to determine if it is effective or not. The benefit of this treatment is that there really are no side effects. Currently the best topical antifungal agent available is *Penlac* nail lacquer, an agent that needs to be applied only once daily. Unfortunately, many insurances will not cover this medication unless certain criteria are met.
- 4) Laser Therapy:** Laser has approximately a 50% success rate. There are minimal side effects. Most insurance companies do not offer this, so financial considerations often lead patients away from this option.
- 5) Oral antifungal (Lamisil/Sporonox):** This is the most effective form of treatment, approximately 70% effective. It requires only 3-4 months of therapy. Oral antifungal medications require blood work to help prevent side effects and insure safety. If blood work is neglected, liver toxicity/failure, thrombocytopenia, kidney problems etc. can occur. If you are taking a medication such as Lipitor, there are other cholesterol lowering agents/Statins that can be substituted during your antifungal treatment.

NOTE: A nail culture is mandatory for all patients with Fungal Nails. Nail cultures take approximately five weeks to complete. The culture will help to determine which antifungal agent will be best for you. If you decide to treat this with an oral antifungal, we recommend also using a topical agent to help improve the effectiveness of treatment. Regardless of what treatment is used, it is also important to treat your shoes. In shoes that can be washed in a washing machine, they should be cleaned a few times per month. Shoes that cannot be washed may be cleaned out with Lysol.