Psoriasis and Nail Infections

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Coping With Nail Infections and Psoriasis

Psoriasis does not only affect your skin — high percentage of individuals who have psoriasis also suffer from nail psoriasis or yeast and fungal infections of the nails. A wide array of treatment options is available to treat nail infections.

Why Are Nail Infections More Common With Psoriasis?

If the skin surrounding your fingernails and toenails is affected by psoriasis, it may be easier for yeast, fungi, and bacteria to enter your body. Your skin may be dry, or have tiny cracks, which provide microorganisms with an entry point into the tissues of your fingers or toes.

Once yeasts and other microorganisms enter your body, the tissues beneath and surrounding your nails provide a perfect environment for them to grow and multiply. As a result, a hard to treat nail infection may ensue. Untreated, your nail may separate from your toe or finger. The infection can easily spread to other nails, fingers, or toes.

If you are taking medications to control your psoriasis, you may be more susceptible to yeast and other infections as well. Medications that reduce your ability to fight infections are immune suppressant drugs, such as steroids. Steroids are often prescribed for sufferers of psoriasis as a means to decrease inflammation and itchiness. Hormonal medications may cause an overgrowth of yeasts too.

Other Causes of Nail Infections

As you grow older, it is likely that your circulation will not be as vigorous as when you were young. This is especially likely to occur in your feet. As a result of sluggish blood flow, your immune system does not fight infections as efficiently as when you were younger.

Prior to the age of 60, approximately 10 percent of people contract nail infections. Between the ages of 60 and 70 that rate doubles. After the age of 70, 50% of people contract at least one nail infection.

If you are a man, you have a higher likelihood of contacting a nail infection than if you are a female. Nail infections tend to run in families.

Working or playing in wet, hot environments gives yeasts and other microorganisms an excellent place to reproduce. Hot work boots, gyms, and public pools are notorious for creating yeast friendly environments.

Next page: 'Preventing Nail Infections'

Preventing Nail Infections

There are many strategies you can take which will help to prevent nail infections:

- Determine if you are taking medications which increase your susceptibility to yeast infections. If you are, ask your doctor if there are alternative medications available which do not cause the same level of risk.
- Take steps to manage your psoriasis. Eat a healthy diet. Learn as much as you can about psoriasis.
- Wash and dry your hands frequently. Pay special attention to the skin which surrounds your nails.
- Ask your doctor to recommend a moisturizer that prevents your skin from cracking, yet does not promote bacterial growth.
- Wash and dry your feet carefully each morning and prior to going to bed at night. Always wash your hands after applying creams or medication to your fingers and toes.
- Report discomfort, swelling, drainage, redness, or openings in the skin surrounding your nails to your doctor for further recommendations. If you have a yeast infection, your nails may have a slight foul odor. You may see a white area beneath your nail. Your nails may thicken and have a rough surface. They may turn yellow, brown, green, or grey. A nail may lift up from the nailbed. Your nails may crumble. These are all signs of a nail infection. Seek medical assistance.
- Consider taking a garlic supplement or eating a clove of uncooked garlic daily. Garlic fights yeast infections.
- Use soaps that contain tea tree oil. Tea tree oil inhibits the growth of yeasts and other microorganisms.
- Change your socks a minimum of once each day. Change them immediately if they become soiled or wet. Wash them in hot water and bleach.
- Wear shoes that provide good circulation to your toes.
- Keep your nails short. Do not wear artificial nails or nail polish.
- Wash clippers, nail files, and other grooming equipment with a disinfectant prior to and after each use. Soaking them for twenty minutes in rubbing alcohol is an inexpensive method.
- Bring your own tools if you get your nails professionally cared for.

Check with your health care provider for further information.

What to Do in the Event of an Infection

Notify your health care provider if you think you may have an infection. While yeast infections are common, many nail infections are cause by fungi. Bacterial infections are less common, but more serious. Many infections are due to a combination of several organisms, including fungi and yeasts.

Treatment

In order to completely get rid of a nail infection, you need to be highly motivated. Most treatments are taken or applied once or twice each day. Treatment is not considered to be complete until the entire nail grows out. Fingernails generally grow out in about a year. It may take one and one half years for a toenail to completely grow out.

Next page: 'What to Do in the Event of an Infection'

Treatment

Some individuals have had success treating nail infections with home remedies, such as bleach, mouthwash and peroxide. I do not recommend their use as they can burn and irritate delicate tissues. My other concern is that they delay treatment with more effective remedies.

Applying undiluted tea tree oil to nails and the surrounding skin can be effective. Topical remedies that contain a substance called undecylenic acid are often recommended. Undecylenic acid is derived from castor oil.

One of the challenges of using topical remedies is that it is difficult for the medication to get beneath the nail and

penetrate the infected tissues below. Several new, topical prescription drugs have been approved for the treatment of nail infections, but they are expensive and may have undesirable side effects.

Oral medications may be effective, however, I do not suggest using them unless the infection is severe. Many of the oral medications have very dangerous side effects. I have not been impressed by the success rates of the prescription drugs. Some are helpful for preventing reinfection, however their ability to clear infections without harmful side effects is limited.

Your dermatologist can provide you with detailed information about the benefits and drawbacks of each kind of treatment.

In severe cases, nail removal may be necessary. This can be accomplished surgically or by having a doctor apply a medication which gradually dissolves the infected nail. The benefit of surgical removal is that when medication is applied afterwards, it goes directly to the infected area. The entire nail or just a portion of it may need removal. While laser treatments are available, research does not indicate that they remove the infection permanently. Check with your dermatologist.

Conclusion

Simply being aware that you have a higher risk of contracting yeast and other infections is valuable. You know how to identify early signs of infection so that you can seek prompt advice and begin treatment quickly.

Take measures which reduce your symptoms of psoriasis and help to make your body less susceptible to yeast and other types of infecting organisms. If you have signs of a yeast infection of your nails, consult with your health care provider so that you can begin an effective treatment plan.