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 **Fungal Nails (Onychomycosis)**

Fungal infections of the toenails are quite common in Florida, due in part to the high humidity. Fungi thrive in a moist environment. Various types of fungi are present everywhere in the environment, but the dark moist surroundings created by shoes and socks makes the feet a prime target. Fungal toe nails are not usually dangerous, however, they can cause thickening, discoloration and disfigurement to the nail. As the fungus grows, it creates a buildup of fungal debris. Pressure from a thickened nail or the buildup of fungal debris may cause pain, ingrown nails, and secondary bacterial infections and wounds.

**Treatment**

There are many ways to treat fungal nails. The most common regimen involves periodic trimming of the nails and application of a topical anti-fungal preparation. This may not fully restore the appearance of a normal nail, however, it usually prevents the infection from worsening. Debridement of nails includes trimming the nails to prevent ingrown nails and reducing the thickness of the nails to prevent shoe pressure. Inspection of the toes for minor cuts and/or nail separation from the underlying skin is important as this can lead to secondary bacterial infections, which can sometimes spread to the skin. Periodically filing the top of the nail with an emory board can help the topical anti-fungal medication penetrate the nail. Just remember to use a new emory board each week so that you are not re-introducing the fungus back into the nail. An over-the-counter anti-fungal such as Urea, Fungoid Tincture, Lamisil or Lotrimin may be used alone or with an added prescription medication. Oral medication is available by prescription for the treatment of fungal toe nails resistant to other forms of treatment. Even after treatment, it is important that you continue to use topical an anti-fungal medication or isopropyl rubbing alcohol on your nails after showering to prevent recurrence.

Things you can do to make your treatment more successful and avoid recurrence:

* Wash feet thoroughly each day with soap and water, especially between toes.
* Dry your feet well after showering.
* Wear socks and avoid nylons. Cottons socks are OK, but synthetic materials can wick moisture away from your skin.
* Use anti-fungal powder in your shoes if excessive sweating is a problem.
* Replace older shoes.
* Clean your shower or bath tub with bleach and make sure the drain is working properly.
* Use a topical anti-fungal medication on your nails.