

# “...but all I did was stub my toe!”

By Molly S. Judge DPM, FACFAS, [www.mollyjudge.com](http://www.mollyjudge.com)



What you don't know about an ingrown nail can hurt you – ingrown nails are perhaps the most common nail deformity known to mankind. This deformity of the nail plate can be benign and tolerated for a lifetime without difficulty. Unfortunately, there are conditions under which the uninteresting nail deformity develops into a real medical problem.

Sometimes it's simply from a bad trim job leaving a sharp corner cutting into the skin. Other times mechanical factors can transform a simple ingrown nail into a flaming infection. Overly tight shoes can cause the side of the nail to dig down deeply into the skin. A common example is wearing those pointy little dress shoes to a wedding reception, then dancing all night despite the crippling pain that the shoes cause. The next day the pain and pressure that results from that can be excruciating. If left unchecked this condition can develop into an infected ingrown nail.

When you begin to show signs of redness beyond the area of the ingrown nail corner it often means that you have a bacterial infection.

A bacterial infection can move quickly into the foot and ankle. This movement of infection within the skin is called cellulites. If left unchecked it can land you in the hospital. People with these out of control ingrown nail infections frequently present to the emergency room (ER).

Other injuries can cause a previously benign ingrown nail to develop into a serious infection. In fact, the simple injury of stubbing your toe can cause enough trauma to begin a true-blue infection. Naturally after you stub your toe you figure it's going to hurt for a few days, unfortunately your body isn't very good at deciphering between the pain of a contusion and an infection.

Once a simple infection like this is drained it generally will heal with basic measures such as applying antibiotic ointment and keeping it clean and covered with a band aid for a week or two. Unfortunately, when this happens to a child often-times they will try to hide it from their parents for fear that they will be carted off to the doctors' of-

fice. If a kid can hide it long enough infection can run up into the foot and fail to stop even with antibiotic pills. In that case they'll probably land in the hospital needing intravenous (IV) medicines and sometimes even surgery.

The upside is that there are oral medications that you can take for the simple infections of ingrown nails. When an ingrown nail goes from bad to worse tenderness, redness and warmth are the signs that you need to see your podiatrist for care.

*Molly S. Judge DPM, FACFAS completed a three-year surgical residency program in major reconstructive surgery for the leg, foot and ankle. She is a Board Certified Foot and Ankle Surgeon with further Board certification in reconstructive foot and ankle surgery. Her office is in Port Clinton, Ohio one block from Magruder Hospital. Her practice focuses on hard-to-manage cases of pain and deformity of the legs, ankles and feet and for reconstructive surgery. As the Official Foot and Ankle Physician for the Marathon LPGA Classic she has been serving the LPGA pros for 18 years.*