

# Do You Have an Ingrown Toenail? Try These Home Remedies

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

May 02, 2026

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Your fingernails and toenails serve essential functions like protection, tactile feedback, and proprioception. When a toenail becomes ingrown, it disrupts balance and causes discomfort, infection, negatively affecting your quality of life
- › Ingrown toenails occur due to poor nail trimming, tight footwear, trauma, or physical growth imbalances. Early symptoms include swelling, redness, and eventually pain and infection if left untreated
- › At-home treatments include soaking in warm water with Epsom salt, trimming nails properly, inserting cotton, using ointments, and keeping the foot clean and uncovered for faster healing
- › Nonsurgical treatments like the cotton wick, dental floss, taping, and brace techniques aim to lift the nail from the skin, offering relief and preventing further complications without invasive methods
- › The BS Brace is a long-term, noninvasive solution ideal for diabetics. It reshapes the nail with minimal discomfort, allowing normal activities while preventing recurrence with multiple applications if needed

Have you ever wondered why humans have nails in their fingers and toes in the first place? While they are small, they are one of the most important traits in the human body. For example, fingernails protect the ends of your fingers and provide tactile feedback<sup>1</sup> for regular human activities, such as pushing a button or playing an instrument.

In the case of your feet, toenails help with proprioception, which is your body's ability to sense movement and spatial recognition.<sup>2</sup> Now, when an ingrown toenail develops in any one of the toes, your proprioception is thrown out of balance, affecting your quality of life.

## Why Ingrown Toenails Develop

According to the Cleveland Clinic, ingrown toenails are common among Americans. It's estimated that every two out of 10 people visit a doctor for this very problem, and there are several reasons why this happens.<sup>3</sup>

- **Improperly nail-cutting technique** — For example, when the toenail is cut too short or rounded, it will eventually embed into the flesh.
- **Tight footwear** — Certain shoes, such as high heels, or any shoe that's too tight for you, will eventually affect the shape of your nail.<sup>4</sup>
- **Physical trauma** — Getting stepped on or stubbing your toe increases the likelihood of ingrown toenails.
- **Physical imbalances** — Sometimes, the way your body grows affects your risk, like when the toenail is larger than your toe.

When a toenail becomes ingrown, you likely won't feel a thing at first. Instead, you'll see redness and some swelling, but not to the point where it's bothering you. Eventually, a mild ingrown toenail will feel swollen, and when this occurs, the edge of the nail grows deeper into the flesh of the toe, allowing bacteria to enter, causing infection. Symptoms begin to appear, such as:<sup>5</sup>

- Liquid or pus in the affected toe
- Pain in the toe
- Swelling

- Inflamed toe that feels warm

## Simple Home Remedies for an Ingrown Toenail

If you're able to catch the ingrown toenail at its earliest stages, you'll be able to cut it at home. But according to The Hearty Soul, this process can be difficult, especially if you've never done it before. If you decide to try this method, I recommend you have a family member assist you.<sup>6</sup>

1. Soak your feet in warm water mixed with either Epsom salt or Castile soap for about 20 minutes to help soften the toenails and skin and reduce any swelling.
2. Using clean fingers, push back the swollen skin carefully. This will likely be uncomfortable. Don't force it back more than the swollen skin allows.
3. Cut the nail straight across. Start with the edges of the toenail, cutting the nail from the sides, not from the middle.
4. Place a small piece of cotton between the ingrown nail and skin. This helps the ingrown toenail from coming back, allowing it to grow correctly.
5. Apply ointment (check out The Hearty Soul's homemade ointment recipe<sup>7</sup>) to the affected area and bandage it carefully.
6. To help with healing, avoid wearing socks and shoes while at home. Wear shoes that avoid dirt but allow open air.
7. It's important to prevent infection by changing the cotton daily, maybe even twice a day.

In addition to the procedure described above, there are other remedies available before you resort to visiting a podiatrist (a doctor who specializes in foot problems). Here are some recommendations:<sup>8</sup>

- **Soak your foot** – Dip the affected foot in warm soapy water to keep the skin clear from bacteria. Do this four times a day to reduce the risk of infections. For improved results, add Epsom salt to the water often. This allows the skin to soften, allowing you to draw out the toenail from the flesh.
- **Wash with castile soap** – If you're not able to find some downtime to soak your foot several times a day, try washing it in soap and water twice a day. Consider using castile soap because it uses natural and pure ingredients.
- **Apple cider vinegar wash** – Mix a quarter cup of apple cider vinegar with warm water for a foot soak. Alternatively, apply a diluted mix by combining vinegar with purified water to your affected foot. This will help clean the area and help relieve symptoms while your toe heals.
- **Essential oil solution** – Essential oils known for their anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties include tea tree, lavender, or clove oil – mix these with a carrier oil, like coconut oil and massage this to the affected area. This helps create a clean environment to help provide relief.

## **If Home Remedies Don't Work, Try These Nonsurgical Treatments**

There are several nonsurgical options available that address the affected toenail itself or the surrounding nail folds. The goal here is to separate the toenail between the nail fold, providing immediate relief. Best Practice Advocacy Centre (BPAC) New Zealand shares commonly used treatments below.<sup>9</sup>

- **The cotton wick (packing) method** – This involves lifting the lateral edge of the affected toenail and placing a small cotton wick under the edge, preventing the toenail from burrowing into the tissue.

It is generally performed without the use of an anesthetic, but a silver nitrate is used to cauterize any surrounding granulation tissue. Once the procedure is complete, the operation is taught to the patient, allowing them to repeat it as necessary. In

addition, it's recommended that the wick is only used for one week because the risk for a fungal infection under the nail bed develops.

- **Dental floss technique** — This procedure is similar to the cotton wick method but using dental floss instead. The floss is inserted in an oblique direction under the corner of the ingrown toenail and pushed inward.

Again, the procedure is done without an anesthetic, and relief is already experienced. The floss is usually left in place until it reaches near the edge of the nail plate, also known as the hyponychium. If the floss becomes dislodged or dirty, you'll need to repeat the procedure to avoid infections.

- **The gutter splint technique** — A small plastic tube, usually from an IV line, is split lengthwise and placed under the lateral edge of the nail. Then, a diagonal cut is made on one end of the tube to facilitate smooth insertion, and the nail corner and lateral edge are lifted so the tube can be inserted between the nail and soft tissue. A local anesthetic is needed for this.

The splint is secured with an adhesive, sutures or acrylic resin. Then, it is covered properly to prevent it from catching onto clothing or beddings. According to BPAC New Zealand, this procedure is highly effective.

- **Taping method** — For this technique, an elastic tape, such as strapping tape, is used to pull the lateral nail fold away from the affected toenail. Specifically, one end of the tape is placed on the toenail then wrapped around the toe, creating an overlap without covering the toenail. While this is the least invasive method, it's recommended that the tape be reapplied every three to seven days for two months to ensure proper recovery.
- **Orthonyxia** — Also called the brace technique, this procedure involves using a metal brace to pull the edge of the affected toenail away from the soft tissue after removing the spicule. According to reviewed literature by BPAC New Zealand, orthonyxia led to complete healing after six to 10 months of treatment.

- **Angle correction technique** – A podiatrist will file the entire surface of the ingrown toenail, reducing the thickness by 50% to 75%. This helps reduce the pressure on the nail fold and is repeated every two months. A different file is used to reshape the edge of the nail.

As you can see, there are several options available. I recommend visiting an experienced podiatrist, emphasizing your intent to use nonsurgical treatments as much as possible. Only consider surgery once all other treatments have failed to provide relief.

## **BS Brace – A Novel, Noninvasive Treatment**

One of the most unique treatments for ingrown toenails is the BS brace, invented by Dr. Bernd Stolz, a German podiatrist, back in 1987.<sup>10</sup> As the name implies, the brace is placed on the ingrown toenail, slowly fixing the curvature until relief is achieved. For those who are looking for a long-term solution, this could be the answer. Azure Advanced Aesthetics (AAA), a surgery practice in Canada, explains the principle behind it.<sup>11</sup>

- **How the BS brace works** – The brace is applied on the ingrown toenail, which pulls on the ingrown side until the nail returns to a normal shape. Since it is not applied anywhere else except the toenail, the brace is virtually allergy-free. According to AAA's patients who tried this procedure, noted that relief is felt within 30 minutes. But those who suffer from severe cases will feel the results in three days.
- **Diabetics will benefit from the BS brace** – The BS brace is a helpful tool for diabetics, as it does not require any procedure that will lead to bleeding, which is a common issue for this condition.
- **No interruption in your daily activities** – Once the brace is applied and pain relief occurs, you're able to resume your routine.

- **Additional braces will need to be reapplied** – Depending on your ingrown toenail's condition, you may need to return to your podiatrist for repeat applications of the BS brace. AAA estimates that it could take anywhere from one to four braces to completely resolve the issue.

To give you an idea on what the BS brace looks like, refer to the images below, courtesy of Mackay Ingrown Toenail Clinic:<sup>12</sup>



*Before brace application.*



*One month later. Note the transparent brace above the toenail.*



*Six months later. Note the transparent brace still attached to the toenail.*

## **How to Prevent Ingrown Toenails from Forming**

Ingrown toenails will inevitably affect your quality of life once they occur. But like most other conditions, prevention goes a long way. Here are some strategies to help lower your risk, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons:<sup>13</sup>

- **Protect the feet from trauma** – Wear appropriate protective shoes when working around heavy equipment or moving heavy items.
- **Choose well-fitting footwear** – Take time to shop for shoes and socks that provide adequate room for the toes.
- **Trim your toenails properly** – Cut toenails straight across with a clean, sharp nail trimmer without tapering or rounding the corners. Lastly, cut the nails no shorter than the edge of the toe.
- **Always keep your feet clean and dry** – Except when you're bathing, swimming, or doing other activities in the water, clean, dry feet will help lower your risk of ingrown toenails.

# **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Home Remedies for Ingrown Toenails**

**Q: Why do we have toenails, and what happens when they become ingrown?**

**A:** Toenails support balance and spatial awareness. Ingrown toenails occur when the nail burrows into the skin, leading to pain, swelling, and infection.

**Q: What causes ingrown toenails to develop?**

**A:** Common causes include improper nail trimming, wearing tight shoes, foot trauma, and natural nail or toe shape imbalances. These factors cause the toenail to grow into the surrounding skin.

**Q: How can I treat an ingrown toenail at home?**

**A:** Early treatment involves soaking the foot in warm water with Epsom salt, trimming the nail straight across, inserting cotton under the nail edge, applying ointment, and keeping the area clean and uncovered.

**Q: What are nonsurgical treatment options for ingrown toenails?**

**A:** Techniques like the cotton wick, dental floss, taping, gutter splint, orthonyxia, and angle correction lift the nail from the skin to relieve pressure and promote proper nail growth without surgery.

**Q: What is the BS Brace, and how does it work?**

**A:** The BS Brace is a noninvasive treatment that gradually reshapes the toenail to reduce pressure and pain. It's suitable for diabetics and allows patients to continue daily activities during healing.

## Sources and References

---

- <sup>1</sup> StatPearls, "Anatomy, Shoulder and Upper Limb, Nails"
- <sup>2</sup> Sutherland Podiatry Centre, "So Why Do We Have Toenails?"
- <sup>3, 5</sup> Cleveland Clinic, "Ingrown Toenails"
- <sup>4, 6, 7, 8</sup> The Hearty Soul, May 21, 2024
- <sup>9</sup> BPAC New Zealand, "Ingrown Toenails: Digging Out the Facts"
- <sup>10</sup> BS Spange, "About Us"
- <sup>11</sup> Azure Advanced Aesthetics, "Frequently Asked Questions About the BS Brace"
- <sup>12</sup> Mackay Ingrown Toenail Clinic, "Non-Surgical Treatments"
- <sup>13</sup> OrthoInfo, "Ingrown Toenail"