

Patient Information for Chronic paronychia - Nail and Distal Digit

Overview

Paronychia, commonly known as nail infection, is inflammation of the region of the finger or toe where the nail starts to grow, which is called the proximal nail fold (PNF). Paronychia is usually the result of a bacterial infection but can be caused by a yeast (*Candida*) or virus, typically the herpes simplex virus (HSV). This inflammation may occur in the short term or may be a long-term problem or one that keeps coming back (chronic).

Chronic paronychia occurs most often in people whose hands are constantly or often exposed to moisture. This type of nail infection may be complicated by the addition of a fungal infection, commonly due to a type of yeast called *Candida*, and this may lead to abnormal nail growth.

Who's At Risk

Chronic paronychia is most common in adult women and those who work in places where their hands are kept moist, such as food handlers, but it has been seen in infants who suck on the thumb or fingers or whose caretakers over-trim the infant's fingernails.

Signs & Symptoms

The proximal nail fold can be swollen, red, and have no cuticle (the strip of hardened skin at the base and sides of a fingernail or toenail). One or more nails may be affected.

Self-Care Guidelines

Avoid water and chemical exposure to prevent symptoms of chronic paronychia.

When to Seek Medical Care

See your doctor for a checkup if you notice signs of bacterial nail infection (proximal nail fold is red, swollen, painful, and may contain pus).

Treatments Your Physician May Prescribe

For chronic paronychia, your doctor may:

- Prescribe a topical steroid.
- Prescribe a topical antifungal medication.
- Prescribe an oral antifungal medicine or antibiotics.