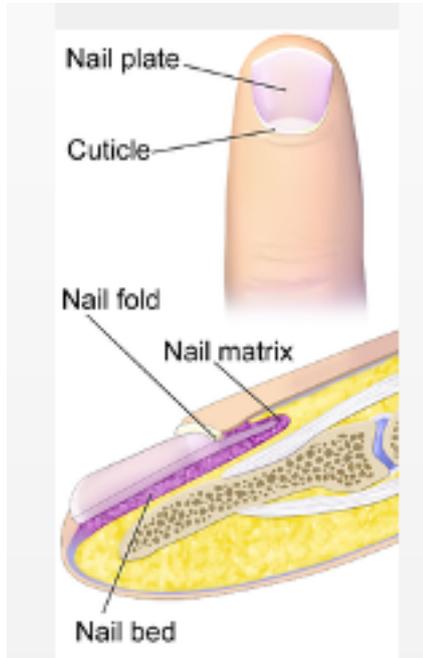


Did you know that your fingernails can provide clues to your overall health?

For example, ice pick-like depressions in the nails (nail pitting) are common in people who have psoriasis — a condition characterized by scaly patches on the skin. Nail pitting can also be related to connective tissue disorders, such as Reiter's syndrome, and alopecia areata — an autoimmune disease that causes hair loss.

**From Wikipedia (to which we donate)**



Pale, whitish nails may indicate a low red blood cell count consistent with anemia.

An iron deficiency can cause the nail bed to be thin and concave and have raised ridges.

Nails can be strengthened by taking biotin (vitamin B7) supplements, and by wearing gloves for all wet work.

A fungal nail infection, can be cleared by taking a course of antifungal tablets (this especially tends to be the cause for crumbly toenails)

If your fingernails curve inwards like spoons (known medically as koilonychia), you may have one of the following disorders:

- iron-deficiency anaemia, which is a reduced number of red blood cells due to a lack of iron in the body
- haemochromatosis, where the body contains too much iron
- Raynaud's disease, a common condition affecting the blood supply to the fingers and toes, causing them to turn white
- lupus erythematosus, an uncommon condition where the immune system attacks the body's cells, tissues and organs.

A bluish tint to nails is a sign of not getting enough oxygen caused by fluid in lungs.

Pitting or small dents on the surface of your nails can be a sign of any of the following diseases:

- psoriasis, a long-term condition that tends to also cause red, flaky patches of skin (10%-50% of patients with psoriasis have pitted nails).
- eczema, a long-term skin condition.
- reactive arthritis, where the immune system attacks the joints, muscles and other parts of the body following an infection.
- alopecia areata, patches of hair loss that tend to come and go.

Deep lines or grooves that go from left to right across the nail are known as Beau's lines. They may be a sign of:

- a previous illness – the line forms at the time of the illness
- chemotherapy
- a previous injury
- previous exposure to extremely cold temperatures, if you have Raynaud's disease

Illness, injury or cold temperatures can interrupt nail growth and cause nail grooves to form at the base of the nails.

These grooves tend to only be noticed a few months later, when the nails have grown and the grooves have moved up the nails to become visible. It takes about four to six months for a fingernail to fully grow out, and 6-12 months for a toenail.

Unusually curved fingertips and nails

Clubbing of the fingertips means the tissue beneath the nails thickens and the fingertips become rounded and bulbous. The fingernails curve over the rounded fingertips.

Clubbing is thought to result from increased blood flow to the fingertips. It can run in families and

be entirely harmless. However, if it suddenly develops, it may be a sign of one of many possible medical conditions, including:

- long-term lung disease or heart disease, such as lung cancer, bronchiectasis, or endocarditis
- inflammatory bowel disease, a long-term disease that causes inflammation of the lining of the gut
- stomach cancer or bowel cancer
- cirrhosis (scarring of the liver)
- polycythaemia, a condition where the blood is too thick

White lines running across nails

White spots or streaks are normal and nothing to worry about, but parallel white lines that extend all the way across the nails, known as Muehrcke's lines, are a sign of low levels of protein in the blood. In contrast to Beau's lines (see above), they're not grooved. They can be due to liver disease or malnutrition. End.

### **Dark stripes running down the nail**

If you have dark skin, it's fairly common to find dark stripes running down your nails (linear melanonychia). This occurs in more than 77% of black people over the age of 20, and in most cases is perfectly normal.

However, it's not something to ignore: dark stripes may sometimes be a form of skin cancer that affects the nail bed, called subungual melanoma. It's important that your doctor checks it to rule out melanoma.

Generally, subungual melanoma only affects one nail. Also, it will cause the stripe to change in appearance (for example, it may become wider or darker over time) and the pigmentation may also affect the surrounding skin (the nail fold).

### **Red or brown little streaks under the nails**

If you have what look like red or brown little streaks underneath the nails, it's likely these are splinter haemorrhages – lines of blood caused by tiny damaged blood vessels.

Just a few splinters under one nail are nothing to worry about and most likely due to injury of the nail. However, if many nails are affected, these splinters may be a sign of lupus erythematosus, psoriasis, an infection of the heart valves (endocarditis) or another underlying disease.

### **A destroyed nail**

Nails can be destroyed by:

- injury, including nail biting
- skin diseases such as psoriasis or lichen planus
- overgrowth of the surrounding tissues, which is usually harmless (for example, due to a wart or verruca) but can sometimes be cancerous
- nail patella syndrome – an uncommon genetic condition which may cause missing nails, usually at birth

If one of your nails becomes destroyed and you don't remember injuring it, it's important to see your GP.

### **Painful, red and swollen nail fold (paronychia)**

Paronychia is the name for inflammation of the nail fold, which is the skin and soft tissue that frames and supports the nail. This is most often caused by infection, injury or irritation. It's about three times more common in women than in men. Sometimes, there's an underlying skin condition such as eczema or psoriasis or another medical condition such as diabetes or HIV.

Paronychia can be acute, where it develops over a few hours, or chronic, where it lasts more than six weeks.

### **Acute paronychia**

Acute infective paronychia usually starts after a minor injury to the nail fold, such as from nail biting, picking or manicures. The affected area is red, warm, tender and swollen. After a while puss may be seen, which can form around the nail and may lift the nail.

Acute paronychia is often caused by Staphylococcus aureus bacteria, although any number of germs can be involved. Treatment is with antibiotic creams or tablets. If there's a large amount of pus, it can help to have this surgically drained.

Sometimes, acute paronychia is caused by the cold sore virus, in which case it's known as herpetic whitlow.

Acute paronychia can completely clear in a few days with treatment, but if it's not treated or doesn't respond to treatment, it can become long-term (chronic).

If a nail is damaged so severely that it has broken away, another nail can grow, but it has to be cared for with specialist advice, because a third one will not grow. See Wong in Human Health Specialists.

### **If fingernails curl under**

Wearing rubber kitchen gloves while doing the dishes and other chores helps because water is bad for nails, it makes them weak.

A massive improvement occurred after regular supplementation with Vit D3 and folic acid.

Saliva has some [enzyme/protein/whatever] that breaks down finger nails, leaving them weak and flimsy. So no nibbling or sucking!

Eating more protein can strengthen and straighten nails.

Vaughan Jones, ONZM Queen's Honour in 2013, for services to farming. 99% dairying honours in 1948. NZ Dairy Board winner for Most Improved Dairy Farm in Waikato 1959. International Agricultural Consultant & Journalist. Represented New Zealand at Agricultural Journalist Congresses in USA in 1992 & Austria in 1994. Managing Director of GrazingInfo.com website since 1970, now with 500 members.

NZ M.Mkt.I founder and chairman. Doubled sales and exports, for many companies.