

“NAIL CHECK – YOUR NAILS CAN REVEAL A LOT ABOUT YOUR STATE OF HEALTH”

Inspection of your nails can reveal several underlying conditions such as cardiac disease, diabetes, haemoglobin deficiency as well as hormonal imbalances - By Dr. Rinky Kapoor

Nails are predominantly made up of a dead protein called Keratin. Nails tend to grow faster in the winter than the summer, and similarly, nail growth is faster in men than in women. Poor health, ageing and hormonal imbalance may also lead to slow growth of nails. Nail irregularities such as white spots, marks, blueness etc. can be symptoms of worrying underlying health conditions and must be evaluated. Timely identification of these signs can aid in the diagnosis of several health conditions.

Let's look at some common nail irregularities and the underlying condition they represent–

1. **White spots** – Minor injury or impact from day to day activities can lead to white spots on the nails. However, these white spots may also be an indicator of underlying infection and liver and kidney diseases.
2. **Dark spots** – Dark spots under the nails must specially be evaluated by a skin specialist. These can be ordinary birth marks under the nails but could also be melanomas, which require immediate treatment.
3. **Pale nails** – Loss of color in nails could be caused by an underlying haemoglobin deficiency.
4. **Blue nails** – Blueness of nails could be a sign of lung or cardiac diseases which may need immediate attention.
5. **Yellow nails** – Yellow nails are a sign of jaundice and liver irregularity.
6. **Club shaped nails** – Irregularly shaped, club shaped nails may be a sign of heart or lung disease.
7. **Flat or planar nails** – Flatness of nails can be caused by an iron deficiency.

Apart from telltale signs of the body's health, nails can also develop problems. Some typical nail conditions are described below –

1. **Ingrown toenails** – This is a common nail condition where instead of growing longer, the toenail starts growing inward into the skin of the toe. Wearing tight shoes and not cutting your nails often can increase the risk of ingrown toenails.

2. **Frequent breakage of nails** - Brittle nails which break often could be due to calcium and Vitamin B deficiency.
3. **Fungal infection** – Abnormal breakage and exposure of the skin and cuticle can result in fungal infection. Fungal infections are commonly seen in people who work in wet areas, people who sweat a lot, active athletes and diabetics.
4. **Bacterial infection** – Bacteria, dirty water and certain chemicals can cause bacterial infection of the nails. This is characterized by redness, swelling and pain in the nails and the surrounding skin.
5. **Warts** – Warts on or under the nails can be caused by a viral infection.
6. **Psoriasis nails** – Almost 80% people suffering from psoriasis experience psoriasis nails. Changes in color, frequent breakage and serrated edges are all indicative of psoriasis nails.

Commonly available treatments for nail problems include:

1. Antifungal medications such as fluconazole tablets, itraconazole capsules and creams, terbinafine capsules and creams can be used after consultation with a doctor.
2. Tumor removal from under the nails can be done using surgery.

Avoiding painful nail conditions can be made possible by taking care of your nails. Here are some common measures to take to avoid nail problems –

- Keeping your nails clean and dry at all times can prevent infection
- Wear correctly fitting shoes and socks
- Do not use nail polish on your nails all the time. It is advisable to keep your nails free of nail polish every now and then
- Soak your hands and feet in warm water containing salt for 5-10 minutes. This will keep your feet clean and skin healthy.
- If you have diabetes or circulatory problems, you should be specially carefully about the health of your nails.
- Undergoing manicures and pedicures too often should be avoided. This may lead to bacterial and fungal infection of the nails.
- Eating proteinaceous foods such as milk, eggs and salmon may be beneficial.