

Nails reflect our overall health, which is why proper nail care is so important. Here are dermatologists' tips for keeping your nails healthy:

1. **Keep nails clean and dry.**
2. **Cut nails straight across.** Use sharp nail scissors or clippers. Round the nails slightly at the tips for maximum strength.
3. **Keep nails shaped and free of snags by filing with an emery board.**
4. **Do not bite fingernails or remove the cuticle.** Doing so can damage the nail.
5. **Do not use your nails as a tool**, such as opening pop cans.
6. **Trim toenails regularly.** Keeping them short will minimize the risk of trauma and injury.
7. **When toenails are thick and difficult to cut, soak your feet in warm salt water.** Mix one teaspoon of salt per pint of water and soak for 5 to 10 minutes.
8. **Avoid "digging out" ingrown toenails, especially if they are infected and sore.** If you are suffering from an ingrown toenail, see a dermatologist for treatment.
9. **Wear shoes that fit properly.** Also alternate which pair of shoes you wear each day.
10. **Wear flip flops at the pool and in public showers.** This reduces the risk of infections caused by a fungus that can get in your toenails.

If your nails change, swell, or cause pain, see your dermatologist because these can be signs of serious nail problems. If you have diabetes or poor circulation, it's especially important to seek treatment for any nail problems. If you have questions or concerns about caring for your nails, [see a board-certified dermatologist](#).

Nail grooming is a simple yet important self-care routine. Not only do short, well-manicured nails look great, they are also less likely to harbor dirt and bacteria, which can lead to an infection. In addition, the right nail clipping technique can help prevent common issues like hangnails and ingrown toenails.

Although nail clipping seems pretty straightforward, there are some important steps you should follow to ensure a healthy cut. To properly trim your nails, dermatologists recommend the following tips:

1. **Soften the nails.** The best time to trim your nails is immediately after taking a bath or shower. However, if that isn't possible, soak your nails in lukewarm water for a few minutes to soften them.
2. **Gather the proper tools.** Use a nail clipper or nail scissors for your fingernails and a toenail clipper for your toenails. Remember to disinfect your tools monthly. To disinfect them, soak a small scrub brush in a bowl of 70 to 90 percent isopropyl alcohol and then use the brush to scrub your nail clippers or nail scissors. Afterwards, rinse the tools in hot water and dry them completely before putting them away.
3. **To trim your fingernails, cut almost straight across the nail.** Use a nail file or emery board to slightly round the nails at the corners, as this will help keep them strong and prevent them from catching on things like clothing or furniture.
4. **To reduce your chances of getting an ingrown toenail, cut straight across when trimming your toenails.** Toenails grow more slowly than fingernails, so you may find that you do not need to trim these nails as often.
5. **Smooth uneven or rough edges using a nail file or emery board.** Always file the nail in the same direction, as filing back and forth can weaken your nails.
6. **Leave your cuticles alone.** Cuticles protect the nail root, so it's important to avoid cutting your cuticles or pushing them back. When you trim or cut your cuticles, it's easier for bacteria and other germs to get inside your body and cause an infection. If you get a nail infection, it can sometimes take a long time to clear.
7. **Moisturize after trimming to help keep your nails flexible.** This is especially important when the air is dry, as dry nails split more easily.
8. **Nails are a reflection of your overall health.** If you notice a change in the color, texture, or shape of your nail, [see a board-certified dermatologist](#). While some changes are harmless, others could be a sign of a disease, such as melanoma, or an infection, such as a nail fungal infection.

Nail biting typically begins in childhood and can continue through adulthood, and the side effects can be more than cosmetic. Repeated nail biting can make the skin around your nails feel sore, and it can damage the tissue that makes nails grow, resulting in abnormal-looking nails. Chronic nail biting can also leave you vulnerable to infection as you pass harmful bacteria and viruses from your mouth to your fingers and from your nails to your face and mouth.

To help you stop biting your nails, dermatologists recommend the following tips:

1. **Keep your nails trimmed short.** Having less nail provides less to bite and is less tempting.
2. **Apply bitter-tasting nail polish to your nails.** Available over-the-counter, this safe, but awful-tasting formula discourages many people from biting their nails.
3. **Get regular manicures.** Spending money to keep your nails looking attractive may make you less likely to bite them. Alternatively, you can also cover your nails with tape or stickers or wear gloves to prevent biting.
4. **Replace the nail-biting habit with a good habit.** When you feel like biting your nails, try playing with a stress ball or silly putty instead. This will help keep your hands busy and away from your mouth.
5. **Identify your triggers.** These could be physical triggers, such as the presence of hangnails, or other triggers, such as boredom, stress, or anxiety. By figuring out what causes you to bite your nails, you can figure out how to avoid these situations and develop a plan to stop. Just knowing when you're inclined to bite may help solve the problem.
6. **Try to gradually stop biting your nails.** Some doctors recommend taking a gradual approach to break the habit. Try to stop biting one set of nails, such as your thumb nails, first. When that's successful, eliminate your pinky nails, pointer nails, or even an entire hand. The goal is to get to the point where you no longer bite any of your nails.

For some people, nail biting may be a sign of a more serious psychological or emotional problem. If you've repeatedly tried to quit and the problem persists, consult a doctor. If you bite your nails and develop a skin or nail infection, [consult a board-certified dermatologist](#).

Having beautiful nails is less a matter of luck and more a matter of caring for them correctly. Here are dermatologists' top manicure and pedicure tips:

1. **Apply a cream to moisturize your nails**, especially after removing nail polish since most removers contain chemicals that dry the nails.
2. To prevent infection, **never cut or forcefully push back your cuticles**. If you must push them back, only do so gently after a shower or bath.
3. While most nail salons follow strict cleanliness and disinfection guidelines, **look for the following when visiting a salon:**
 - Does your nail technician have the necessary experience and/or license, if required?
 - Are the stations clean?
 - Does the nail technician wash her hands between clients?
 - Are there dirty tools lying around?
 - In addition, do not hesitate to ask how they clean their tools.
4. **Shave your lower legs after getting a pedicure, not before**. That means not shaving your lower legs for at least 24 hours before you get a pedicure. If you nick yourself while shaving, a pedicure could put you at risk for an infection.
5. If you get frequent manicures and pedicures, **consider purchasing your own tools** to be used at the salon.
6. In addition, **check that the pedicure foot-baths and filters are thoroughly disinfected before you use them**. If they are improperly cleaned, they can harbor bacteria and fungus. If the salon does not appear clean, then move on.
7. **If you want to wear a bright red or orange polish, prevent discoloration by applying an extra layer of base coat**. If your nails become yellowed and discolored from the polish, your nails should return to normal color over several weeks if the same color is not reapplied.
8. While some people beg to differ, **there is no scientific evidence that immersing nails in gelatin makes them stronger**. Polishes that contain strengthening ingredients increase nail stiffness, which may make nails break more frequently.
9. **Do not wear artificial nails to cover up nail problems** as they may make them worse. Artificial nails are not recommended for people who are prone to fungal infections or have brittle nails. For people with healthy nails, artificial nails can be fine as long as they are not worn continuously.
 - Know what products are used in your artificial nails as the substances used can cause an allergic reaction in some people. If you develop a rash or other reaction, tell your doctor what products you used.

If you have questions or concerns about caring for your nails, you should make an appointment to [see a board-certified](#) dermatologist.