

What to Do for Nail Changes

Nail changes can happen to fingernails, toenails, or both. Nail changes can happen for many reasons, including cancer treatment. Nails are made up of:

- The nail plate (the hardest part of the nail and the part that can be seen)
- The nail bed (tissue underneath the nail plate)



What causes nail changes?

Some cancer treatments can cause changes to your nails. These changes may affect how your nails look, feel, and work.

Nail changes can be temporary or may last.



What common nail changes should I watch for?

- Dark areas under the nail, which look like bruises, and are most often seen along the cuticle (bottom edge of the nail)
- Small, thin cracks or deep cuts or tears in the fingertip, nail plate, or nail bed, which can be painful
- Small red lines that are tiny areas of bleeding under the nail plate
- Darkening of the skin around the nail, or on the nail itself (color changes)
- Redness, and sometimes swelling of the nail bed and skin around the finger or toe, which may be a sign of infection and can be painful
- Lifting of the nail plate, which can increase the risk of infection and that the nail will fall off
- Complete loss of the nail plate, which can be painful and increase the risk of infection until the nail grows back
- Ridges or colored lines in the nail plate, which will grow out after treatment ends



What you can do to prevent or manage nail changes

- Check your hands and feet every day to look for changes in your nails.
- Avoid injuries to your nails as much as possible.
- Use a water-soluble nail coating, like nail polish, on nails that have ridges, are delicate, or are splitting.
- Keep your nails trimmed short. Short nails are less likely to break or get caught.
- Keep your nails clean to avoid infections.
- Wear gloves to protect your nails when putting them in water (such as washing dishes), gardening, or cleaning.
- Ask your cancer care team if it's OK to get professional manicures while you are getting treatment for cancer.
- Wear loose-fitting shoes.
- Avoid pressure to your nail beds (both fingers and toes).
- Tell your cancer care team about any changes in your nails. If you have pain or infection with your nail changes, talk to your cancer care team before trying any home remedies.



Talk to your cancer care team.

Ask your cancer care team if your treatment is likely to cause nail changes. Ask what kind of changes to watch for and how to manage them. Let your cancer care team know if you have any changes in your nail plate, swelling, redness, or pain around your nail.

For cancer information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society

website at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**.

We're here when you need us.