



# Why do I need nail surgery?

## Introduction

If you have an ingrowing toenail or a painful nail that is excessively curved or thickened, you may benefit from nail surgery.

## What is nail surgery?

Nail surgery can be the removal of a small part of the toenail (partial nail avulsion) or removal of the whole nail (total nail avulsion). This procedure is carried out under local anaesthetic, so the surgery is not painful. This involves an injection on either side of the toe. Normally the cells where the nail originates are destroyed to prevent the nail re-growing and causing further problems. This is achieved with the use of an acid (phenol) which creates a controlled chemical burn. You will not need to have any stitches in your toe. You will be able to walk after surgery, however you will need to organise a lift home.

## How long will my toe take to heal after surgery?

On average it takes roughly 4 weeks for the wound to heal. During this time, you will need to keep the toe clean and dressed to help to prevent infection. You will need to attend the clinic for your first redressing 2-3 days after surgery. Other redressing appointments will be arranged as necessary. You can often speed up the healing by maintaining good foot hygiene and keeping the area dry, clean and dressed. If you have an infection in the toe, this is likely to slow down the healing process.

## What will my toe look like after surgery?

Immediately following surgery, you will have a large bandage on the toe. This is used to absorb any bleeding and to apply mild compression to the area. This will remain in place until the first dressing change appointment. You will be unable to wear a shoe home due to the dressings size so please bring a sandal or thong with you to your surgery appointment.

With a partial nail avulsion your toenail will be narrower than it was, but every attempt will be made to ensure that your toe looks as normal as possible after surgery. With a total nail avulsion, your toenail will not grow again. If you are concerned about the possible appearance of your toe after surgery, please discuss this with your podiatrist.



## **What complications can occur with nail surgery?**

- Anaphylaxis is a known but very rare potential side effect of local anaesthetic.
- The success of a nail surgery is very good, however in a small number of cases (approx..5%) some of the nail can regrow and this may require further surgery.
- The acid used to destroy the cells where the nail originates can potentially cause an excessive chemical burn leading to a prolonged healing time and possible periostitis (bone pain).
- Infection of the surgical site can occur which may require a short course of antibiotics. Infection is known to delay wound healing which may prolong healing time beyond 4 weeks.
- In extremely rare cases, it is possible for this type of infection to travel into the bone within the toe following surgery. This type of complication can result in the need for intravenous antibiotics or amputation of the toe.
- The risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is extremely low but is a known risk following surgery.
- Complex Region Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is another known complication following any type of surgery, however extremely rare.
- Pain following this type of surgery is usually mild quite often only requiring Paracetamol for pain relief.