

Fingernail Injury

Definition

- Injury to a fingernail.
- The injury is a minor one.
- If unsure, contact your child's doctor.

Health Information

Types of Fingernail Injuries

- **Blood Clot Under the Nail.** Most often caused by a crush injury. Common causes are a door crushing a finger or a heavy object falling on the nail. Many are only mildly painful. Some are severely painful and throbbing. These need the pressure under the nail released by your doctor. This can relieve the pain and prevent loss of the fingernail.
- **Torn Fingernail.** Some are from catching a long nail on something. Others are from a crush injury.
- **Finger Nailbed Injury.** If the area underneath the fingernail (the nailbed) is cut, it needs to be seen by a doctor. Sutures are needed to close the cut. Without sutures, the nailbed could grow a deformed fingernail in the future.

Types of Finger Injuries, Sparing the Fingernail

- **Cuts, Bruises and Scrapes (skinned knuckles).** These are the most common finger injuries.
- **Jammed Finger.** This happens when the end of a straightened finger receives a blow. Most often, this is from a ball. The force causes injury to the joint. For jammed fingers, always check that the fingertip can be fully straightened.
- **Crushed or Smashed Fingertip.** Most often, this is from a door. The end of the finger may get a few cuts or a blood blister. Sometimes, the nail can be damaged.
- **Fractures or Dislocations.** These injuries are caused by more severe forces. They require medical attention.
- See the Finger Injury handout for more details.

Symptoms

- The main symptom is pain.
- Blood clots under the nail will look red, purple or blue.
- Finger may be swollen or bruised.
- It may be hard to move the finger without pain.

Prevention

- Supervise young children carefully.
- Teach older children about high risk behaviors.
- Keep fingernails trimmed.

Care Advice

1. **Key Points**

- Most torn fingernails can be treated at home.
- Many blood clots under the fingernail also can be treated at home.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **Torn Fingernail**

- For a cracked nail without rough edges, leave it alone.
- For a large flap of nail that's almost torn through, cut it off. Use a pair of scissors that have been cleaned. Cut along the line of the tear. Reason: Pieces of nail will catch on objects.
- For initial pain relief, soak the finger in cold water for 20 minutes.
- Apply an antibiotic ointment such as Polysporin. No prescription is needed.
- Then cover with a Band-Aid. Change daily.
- After about 7 days, the nailbed should be covered by new skin. It should no longer hurt. At that time, you can stop covering the wound.
- What to expect: A new nail will start to grow in over 6 to 8 weeks. It will take 6 months or longer to look normal.

3. **Blood Clot Under a Fingernail**

- Blood under the fingernail always hurts.
- Treatment depends on the amount of pain.
- For initial pain relief, soak the finger in cold water for 20 minutes.
- After that mild pain only needs pain medicine.
- Severe pain that interferes with normal activities or sleep needs medical attention.
- Your doctor can make a small hole through the center of the fingernail. This releases the blood to relieve the pressure and pain.

4. **Small Cuts or Scratches of Skin**

- For any bleeding, put direct pressure on the wound. Use a gauze pad or clean cloth. Press for 10 minutes.
- Wash the wound with soap and water for 5 minutes.
- For any dirt in the wound, wash gently.
- For any cuts, use an antibiotic ointment such as Polysporin. No prescription is needed.
- Cover it with a Band-Aid. Change daily.

5. **Pain Medicine**

- Fingernail injuries are often quite painful.
- To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.

6. **Remove Any Rings**

- Remove any ring that is on an injured finger.
- Reason: Swelling may occur.

Call Your Doctor If

- Pain becomes severe
- Pain not better after 3 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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