What your Nails Speak about your Health

Examining Your Fingernails

Clubbed Nails

Softening of nail bed with loss of normal lovibond angle between nail bed and the fold

Causes

- Pulmonary & cardiovascular (80%)
- Gastrointestinal (5%)
- Hyperthyroidism (1%)

Note: Chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases does not cause clubbing
Koilonychia

Spoon shaped concave nails. These occur normally in children & resolve with age

Causes

- Iron deficiency
- Diabetes mellitus
- Protein deficiencies, especially in sulphur containing amino acids
- Exposure to petroleum-based solvents
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Raynaud's diseases

Beaus Growth Arrest Lines

Transverse lines in the substance of the nail as a sign of previous acute illness

Causes

- Severe infection
- Myocardial infarction
- Hypotension, shock
• Hypocalcemia
• Surgery

Note: location of Beau's lines half way up the nail suggests illness 3 months ago

## Thin Brittle Nails

Thin, brittle nails can indicate the following

### Causes

- Metabolic bone diseases (nail thinness is correlated with osteopenia)
- Thyroid disorders
- Systemic amyloidosis (yellow waxy flaking)
- Severe malnutrition

## Onychorrhexis

Presence of longitudinal striations or ridges, can be because of advanced age or also can occur with following:

### Causes

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Lichen planus
- Darier's disease (striations are red/white)
- Central ridges can be caused by
- Iron deficiency
- Folic acid deficiency
- Protein deficiency

**Central Nail Canal (Median Nail Dystrophy)**

When the central nail canal is present the cuticle is usually normal

**Causes**

- Severe arterial diseases
- Peripheral artery disease
- Severe malnutrition
- Repetitive trauma

**Nail Pitting**

Small punctate depressions caused by nail matrix inflammation
Causes

- Psoriasis (random appearance of pits)
- Alopecia areata (geometric rippled grid)
- Eczema
- Lichen planus

Nail Beading

Beads seem to drip down the nail like wax.

Endocrine conditions

- Diabetes mellitus
- Thyroid disorders
- Addison’s disease
- Vitamin B deficiency

Rough Nail Surface

When nail looks sandpapered and dull
Causes

- Autoimmune disease
- Psoriasis
- Chemical exposure
- Lichen planus

Nail Thickening

Slow nail growth produces thickness

Causes

- Onychomycosis
- Chronic eczema
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Yellow nail syndrome
- Psoriasis

Onycholysis

Distal separation of the nail plate from the nail bed
Causes

- Thyrotoxicosis
- Psoriasis
- Trauma
- Contact dermatitis
- Tetracycline
- Eczema
- Toxic exposures (solvents)
- Blistering from autoimmune diseases
- Blistering from sun exposure

**Severe Nail Curvature**

Curved or beaked nails are caused by reabsorption of distal digit

Causes

- Hyperthyroidism
- Renal failure
- Psoriasis
- Systemic sclerosis
Complete Nail Destruction

Complete local nail destruction can be caused by local mechanisms, including trauma & paronychia

Causes

- Toxic epidermal necrolysis
- Chemotherapy
- Bullous diseases
- Vasculitis

Abnormalities Of Lunula

Lunula absent

Causes

- Anemia
- Malnutrition
- Pyramidal lunula
Causes

- Excessive manicure
- Trauma

Pale blue lunula

Causes

- Diabetes mellitus
- Red discoloration
Causes

- Cardiovascular diseases
- Collagen vascular diseases

**Transverse White Lines (Mee's Lines)**

Mee's line approximately one third of the way up the nail, suggesting a significant illness 2 months previously

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Causes

- Any acute illness
- Heavy metal toxicity (classically arsenic)
- Chemotherapy

*Note: the time of events may be determined from the lines on nail*

**Leukonychia Striae**

White splotches on the nails
Note: the location of white splotches which can indicate timing of the traumatic event

Causes

- Minor trauma to the nail matrix

**Longitudinal Brown Lines**

These occur because of increased melanin produced by nail melanocytes

Causes

- Addison's diseases
- Nevus at the nail base
- Breast cancer
- Melanoma
- Trauma

**Splinter Hemorrhages**

They are caused by hemorrhage of the distal capillary loop

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**Causes**

- Subacute bacterial endocarditis
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Trichinosis
- Pityriasis rubra pilaris
- Psoriasis
- Renal failure

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**Terry's Half And Half Nails**

The proximal portion is white (edema & anaemia) & the distal portion is dark

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**Causes**

- Renal failure
- Liver disease
- Congestive heart failure
- Adult onset diabetes mellitus
- Malnutrition
- Hyperthyroidism
Generalised Discoloration Of White Nail Plate

White Nail

Causes

- Anaemia
- Renal failure
- Cirrhosis
- Diabetes mellitus
- Chemotherapy
- Hereditary

Yellow Nail

Causes

- Diabetes mellitus
- Amyloidosis
- Median/ulnar nerve injury
- Thermal injury
- Jaundice

Brown Grey Nail

Causes

- Cardiovascular diseases
Diabetes mellitus
- Vit B12 deficiency
- Breast cancer
- Malignant melanoma
- Lichen planus
- Syphilis
- Topical agents like hair dyes

Pink/Red Nail

Causes
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Carbon monoxide
- Angioma
- Malnutrition

Green/Black Nail

Causes
- Topical preparations (chlorophyll derivatives, methyl green & silver nitrate)
- Chronic Pseudomonas spp infection
- Trauma

Paronychial Inflammation

Separation of the seal between the proximal nail fold & the nail plate that provides entry for bacteria & leads to localized infection of the paronychial tissues of the hands
Symptoms

- Inflammation
- Swelling
- Scaling

**Periungal Telangeictasia**

It is caused by dilated capillary loops & results in atrophy of the cuticle

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Causes

- Collagen vascular disease
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Dermatomyositis
- Scleroderma

**Mucus Cyst**

It is a collection of degenerative collagen that can cause swelling & ridging of the nail above the cyst, forming a "gutter"
References


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