

A guide for patients about Nail Surgery

What is nail surgery?

If you have a nail condition that cannot be resolved by routine care at the clinic, we may advise that you have either part of the nail removed (a partial nail avulsion) or the whole of the nail removed (a total nail avulsion). We then apply a chemical to the nail bed to stop the nail growing back.

Why do people have nail surgery?

The most common reason for having nail surgery is an ingrowing toenail. Anyone who has experienced this condition will know just how painful it is and also how frequently it causes painful infections. Removal of the piece of nail will relieve the pain and eliminate the cause of infections.

Sometimes nails are very thick and cause pain or discomfort from shoe pressure. In this case the whole of the nail needs to be removed.

What does nail surgery involve?

First of all we numb the area by giving a local anaesthetic injection into the base of the toe. When we are certain that your toe is completely numb, we put on a tourniquet (a band put around your toe to stop it from bleeding) and then we remove either a narrow piece of nail from the side causing the problem or the whole nail. Next we apply a chemical caustic to stop the nail growing back.

Does it hurt?

The injection stings a little but it is over quite quickly. After that you won't feel any pain, although you will still feel us moving your toe about.

Will it hurt when the anaesthetic wears off?

The anaesthetic generally wears off after a couple of hours. You may feel some discomfort but this varies from person to person. If necessary, take a pain relief tablet. Do not take any medication that contains aspirin as it may cause bleeding. However, if you take aspirin as part of your normal medication you should continue to do so.

Children under the age of 16 having the surgery must be accompanied by a person with legal parental responsibility. If you are not sure who has legal parental responsibility, please contact the clinic.

How long does the surgery take?

The procedure itself takes is not lengthy timewise, but it may take a little while for your toe to go numb and there is quite a bit of paperwork and assessment. So, overall you should allow about an hour and a half.

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes. The room may be very small though, so please only bring one person. Small children are not allowed into the room.

Will I be able to eat and drink normally that day?

Yes, we recommend that you eat and drink normally but avoid alcohol for 24 hours before and after surgery.

Do I need to bring anything with me?

If you take warfarin please bring your INR book with you. If your INR is not stable, phone the clinic for advice as soon as possible before your appointment. If you have asthma and/or angina, please bring your medications with you.

What shoes should I wear?

We will put on quite a big dressing so you will need to bring some sandals or very roomy open-toed shoes. Nails should be free of nail varnish.

Do you need to know if there are any changes to my health?

Yes, it is important you let us know if there are any changes to your health or medication. There is a limit to how much local anaesthetic you can have in a 24 hour period. Avoid any procedures which may involve a local anaesthetic, for example at the dentist, 24 hours before and after your appointment with us.

Are there any risks?

No surgery is without risk. It is possible that:

- the nail will regrow
- the wound may get infected
- it may take longer than average to heal
- you may experience an allergic reaction to the local anaesthetic or the caustic
- there may be some scarring
- if we remove both sides of the nail you may temporarily lose the remaining nail.

The chemicals we use may cause harm to an unborn child. So if you are pregnant, or think you might be pregnant, we will not be able to carry out this procedure.

Will I be able to walk afterwards?

Yes, although you must be careful because your toe will be numb. We advise you to rest with your foot up in the waiting room for about 10 minutes before you go and then sit with your foot up again when you get home, however, you should try to walk periodically.

What do I do if my toe is infected?

If your toe is infected on the day of surgery it may mean we are unable to carry out the procedure as there is a chance the anaesthetic may not work. Should this be the case, we will supply you with a course of antibiotics to counteract the infection. At this point, we will reschedule your surgery for about a week, by which time, the infection should have subsided sufficiently for us to be able to carry out the procedure.

Can I drive afterwards?

No, you should not drive until the effects of the anaesthetic have worn off (as advised by the DVLA). Please make arrangements for someone to bring you and take you home.

When can I wear normal shoes?

We will replace the dressing after one or two days. The new dressing will be much smaller and will allow you to wear ordinary shoes. Your toe will heal more quickly if there is nothing pressing on, or squashing, the wound area.

How long will I be off work?

That depends on the work that you do. We would advise you not to return to work that day, but most people can go back to work the day after your surgery.

How long does it take to heal?

Everyone is different but on average it takes six to nine weeks to heal if part of the nail is removed and 10 to 12 weeks if the whole nail is removed. During this time you will be able to walk and carry on your life as normal although you should avoid sporting activities or dancing.

Will I need to change the dressings myself?

After the surgery you will be given a pack of dressings and sterile solutions, along with instructions for their use. The podiatrist will demonstrate how to use the contents, and advise you of the redressing procedure in between follow-up appointments.

While your toe is healing it will be weeping and/or discharging. This is healthy and normal, and does not mean your toe is infected.

Check the toe when you are redressing it for signs of post-operative infection. This includes:

- pain
- redness
- heat
- swelling
- smelly and/or excessive discharge.

A combination of the above rather than one only may mean you have a post-operative infection. If you suspect that you may have an infection then we would recommend you contact us immediately so as we can supply you with the necessary antibiotics to treat it.

If you have any other concerns please contact us.