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# Surgery for Ingrown Toenails

Information for patients



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## Overview

### Topic

### Surgery for ingrown toenails (partial or total removal of nail bed)

### What is it?

An ingrown toenail is a common disorder and mainly affects the big toe. The nail of the affected toe curls around and grows into the skin on one or both sides of the toe and can be very painful. In some cases it may become infected. The affected nail may also be very thickened (gryphotic) and this then causes added pressure to the nail. As the condition becomes more persistent, there can be a chronic infection and the formation of excess skin called hypergranulation tissue.

### Why would surgery be done?

In some cases ingrown toenails can resolve themselves with good nail cutting. In addition, advice to reduce pressure from the area and antibiotics to treat the infection will be given, if necessary. However, if the nail continues to be ingrown or you have recurrent infections, surgery to permanently remove the offending piece of nail or the whole nail will be considered.

### What does it involve?

A local anaesthetic block around the toe to make it numb. A partial wedge resection (Winograd procedure) involves removal of the side section of the nail along with the matrix which is the tissue from which the nail grows. Once this is removed the wound is closed with absorbable stitches. A total matrixectomy (Zadek's procedure) involves removing the nail plate in full, along with the matrix. The incision lines are closed using absorbable stitches. This wound may take longer to heal as it heals from the base upwards.



**How long will I be in the hospital?**

This is performed on an outpatient basis where you are in and out of clinic on the same day. The procedure takes approximately one hour.

**Will I have to go to sleep (general anaesthetic)?**

Surgery is nearly always performed under local anaesthetic only. The operation can be done under general anaesthetic (asleep). The local anaesthetic block can provide up to 6 hours of pain relief, but you will also be given pain-killing tablets as required. Ensure you have paracetamol and ibuprofen at home after surgery.

**Will I have a dressing on afterwards?**

Yes, you will have a dressing on after the surgery which may look bulky and you will be given a post-operative shoe to use. You will need to keep the dressing in place until you are given a follow-up appointment between 2-4 days at the outpatient clinic for a dressing change. The appointment will be given to you before you leave.

**What will happen after I go home?**

You need to keep your foot up and elevated for the first 24 hours following your surgery. You will be given a post-operative shoe to wear to prevent pressure on the surgical site. You will need to keep the dressing clean and dry and in place.

### **Key points of ingrown toenail surgery**

- It is normally performed under local anaesthetic in the outpatient clinic.
- The procedure takes approximately one hour.
- As soon as you return to normal shoes and depending on your recovery you may be able to drive 3-4 days after your surgery at the first dressing change. However, you must be able to do an emergency break for insurance purposes. If you require further clarification please call your insurer.
- Return to full activities in 10 days.

## How soon can I...

### • Walk on my foot?

You can walk out of the outpatient clinic, but we advise you keep your foot up when you arrive home. You will be able to stand and take weight on your operated foot after the operation, but you must rest, with your feet up, as much as possible.

### • Go back to work?

If your foot is comfortable you can return to work within a few days (usually after your first dressing change).

### • Drive?

As soon as you return to normal shoes and depending on your recovery you may be able to drive 3-4 days after your surgery at the first dressing change. However, you must be able to do an emergency break for insurance purposes. If you require further clarification please call your insurer.

### • Play sport?

Once the incision line has healed and is comfortable in sports shoes you are able to go back to activity/sports. This is usually between 10 and 14 days.

## What can go wrong?

Minor infections in the incision site can occur and normally settle after a short course of antibiotics.

Recurrence of the ingrown toenail is rare and usually occurs either if a small section of the nail matrix is not removed or too small a section of the nail plate is excised.

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS). This is a rare but difficult complication. It occurs when there is an abnormal response of the nervous system to surgery, but it can happen after simple trauma (e.g. a sprained ankle). This can lead to a variety of painful sensations in the foot which require medical and pain-relieving medications.

**Please note, if a complication arises, recovery may be delayed.**



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