

# When is it nail fungus?

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(HealthDay)—If you think you have nail fungus, you might be tempted to hide your problem with nail polish or self-treat with over-the-counter antifungal products. But you should visit a doctor instead, a

dermatologist suggests.

"Nail [fungus](#) can be an embarrassing problem, but you shouldn't be embarrassed to discuss it with a board-certified dermatologist, who can help you manage this condition," said Dr. Shari Lipner. She is an assistant professor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City.

"Although nail fungus is the most common nail disorder that dermatologists treat, not every nail problem is caused by fungus, and there are several other conditions that may look similar, including [nail psoriasis](#) and nail trauma," Lipner said in an American Academy of Dermatology news release.

"If you treat something that's not a fungus as a fungus, it may not help your problem; in fact, it could make the condition worse," she explained.

"On the other hand, if you do have a fungal infection and let it go unchecked, the symptoms could worsen, possibly causing pain or interfering with your everyday activities," she said. "For some patients, nail fungus is not just a cosmetic or aesthetic problem."

Early signs of nail fungus may include lifting of the nail off the skin and yellow or white discoloration. As the condition worsens, nails may become thicker, difficult to cut and increasingly discolored, or they may become thinner, prone to crumbling and splitting.

"If you experience bothersome nail symptoms, see a board-certified dermatologist, who can evaluate your condition and recommend the best available treatment for you," Lipner said.

"It's especially important to seek treatment for [nail conditions](#) if you have underlying medical issues, such as diabetes, poor circulation or a

weakened immune system," she added.

**More information:** The American Podiatric Medical Association has more on [nail fungus](#).

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