



Looking after your Ingrowing Toenail

What is an ingrowing toenail?

An Ingrowing toenail is a very common foot problem I see in my clinic every day. The big toe is often affected, it occurs when the sides of the nail pierces the surrounding skin, this can be on one side, or both sides of the toe. It may appear red and inflamed, with some pus discharging from the toe.

What can cause an ingrowing toenail?

There are several factors that can cause an ingrowing toenail. Listed below are four of the most common factors.

1. Shape of the nail – an excessively curved or excessively wide nail plate can lead to pressure on the skin around the nail, making the skin more vulnerable to damage.
2. Pressure from shoes – too narrow or a very shallow toe- box, can cause pressure on the toes, leading to skin damage around the nail.
3. Trauma to the toe – this could be from stubbing the toe, or wearing ill-fitting shoes for a prolonged period of time.
4. Improper nail cutting – cutting down the sides of the nail, where a sharp edge of nail is left in the toe, or the nail may break off and pierce the skin.

How can I prevent it?

- Wearing well-fitting shoes with a fastener to better support your foot and limit movement in the shoe will reduce pressure on the toe.

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- Wearing shoes with a toe-box that fits the shape of your toes, e.g. rounded toes = rounded toe-box.
- Cutting your nails straight across, and filing down any sharp edges on the sides of the nail with a good quality emery board.
- Don't allow your toenails to grow too long, cut and file them regularly. This will reduce the chance of the nail breaking, and leaving a sharp edge in the side of the toe.

What can I do if I develop it?

If you have an ingrowing toenail, you can start a simple home treatment by soaking the toe in salty water every day and keeping it clean with a sterile lint dressing. This is a tried and tested method used to reduce swelling, and minimize the risk of infection.

What you will need:

- ✓ Half a cup of Salt (any salt will do)
- ✓ A bowl of freshly boiled luke warm water, **ALLOW THIS TO COOL DOWN** (use two separate bowls if treating 2 toes, to prevent cross-infection)
- ✓ Clean piece of Kitchen roll or clean flannel
- ✓ Sterile lint dressing to keep the toe clean
- ✓ Medical tape
- ✓ Clean pair of scissors
- ✓ Toe bandage size 12 (optional)

(Dressing packs are available to purchase from the clinic. This can be sent to you in the post, email info@thevaleclinic.com for more information.)

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Instructions on daily saline footbaths and dressing the toe

1. Have your dressings and bowl of clean water laid out before you shower. (for future dressing changes, you can leave the old dressing on during your shower as it will be easier to remove, especially if the dressing is stuck to the toe.)
2. Dissolve the salt in the bowl of water, prior to soaking your toe.
3. Once showered, soak the toe in the clean bowl of **cooled** freshly boiled salty water. Soak the toe no longer than 10 mins. If you have 2 toes to dress, (e.g. one on the left foot, and the other on the right) soak each of them separately to avoid cross infection or contamination.
4. Pat the excess water off with a clean piece of kitchen roll or a flannel.
5. Cut the lint dressing to the right size for the toe, using the clean pair of scissors and place the lint dressing (or similar dressing) over the top of the toe.
6. Pre- cut 2 pieces of medical tape.
7. Use one piece of tape to secure the dressing to the toe, going from one side, then round the back of the toe to the other side of the dressing, leaving a gap on the top – do not encircle the whole toe as this can cut off the blood supply if wrapped round too tightly.
8. Using a pre-cut length of the toe bandage, (usually a 2.5 length, using the length of your index finger as a guide) open the tubular bandage and place it over the toe. Twist the toe bandage halfway along the length twice, just enough to close it off, without forming a solid knot at the end, and fold it back on itself. (a solid knot on the end will irritate the toe in the shoe)
9. Use the second piece of tape to secure the toe bandage from the front to the back of the toe.

It is advisable to redress your toe/s every day, until it heals.

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Soaking the toe daily in salty water will help, but if there is a sharp piece of nail in the corner of the toe, this will need to be removed as the toe will not heal if this is left in place. Call the clinic for treatment.

The first line of treatment is usually conservative care. The section of the nail causing the problem is removed. If the problem is re-current, I can offer [toenail surgery](#) to permanently resolve the ingrowing toenail, and to prevent further pain and risk of infection.

If the toe becomes infected don't leave it as it can become worse. Signs of infection are a malodourous smell, spreading redness, heat, swelling and persistent pain. If you notice any of these signs, please contact either the podiatry clinic or your GP for advice and treatment. I treat this type of foot problem in my clinic regularly, so don't be embarrassed about your toe. If you are worried, call the clinic for an appointment.

I now run a [virtual podiatry clinic](#), if you would prefer this option for an initial consultation. You can [book online](#) or call 07988 916 198 to make an appointment for a video call.



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