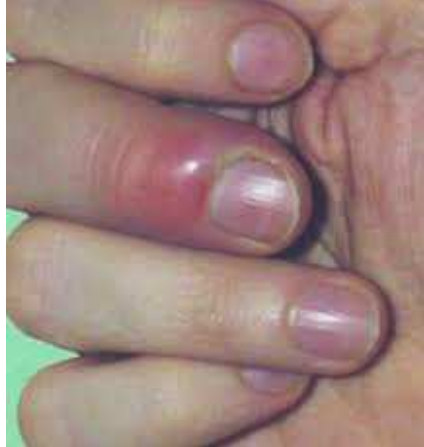


# Paronychia

Paronychia is a common infection of the skin just next to a nail. Treatment involves antibiotic medicines for bacterial infections or antifungal medicine for infection caused by a fungus.

## What is Paronychia?

Paronychia is an infection of the skin just next to a nail (the nail fold). The infected nail fold looks swollen, inflamed and may be tender. There may also be a small collection of pus in the swelling. The nail itself may become infected or damaged if a nail-fold infection is left untreated.



## What causes nail-fold infections?

### **Bacteria.**

These tend to cause sudden-onset (acute) nail-fold infections which are painful.

### **Candida.**

This is a yeast (a type of fungus). Nail-fold infections with candida tend to develop slowly and cause persistent (chronic) infection. They do not cause pus to appear.

### **Other germs (microbes).**

These include viruses and other fungi. They are less common causes.

## Why do nail-fold infections develop?

Many nail-fold infections occur for no apparent reason. However, the following can increase the risk of germs (bacteria) and other germs getting into the nail-fold skin and causing infection:

### **Water.**

You are more likely to develop a nail-fold infection if your hands are in water for long periods, particularly with detergents. Cleaners, bartenders, beauticians, dish washers, etc, are prone to nail-fold infections. Constant washing may damage the nail fold and allow infection to develop.

### **Injury.**

For example, nail biting, poor manicure, damaged or diseased nails or nail folds, etc.

### **Covering.**

For example, if you use gloves for long periods, or use artificial nails, it can cause a moist, airless condition around your fingernails. This is good for some germs to thrive and cause infection.

## **What is the treatment for nail-fold infections?**

### **Bacterial infections**

If your infection is caused by bacteria then an antibiotic for seven days may be prescribed. Sometimes pus from a bacterial infection has to be drained by a very small cut if it collects next to the nail.

It may also help to soak the affected finger in warm salted water four times a day. Painkillers, often work well to ease any pain.

If the antibiotic prescribed is not improving your infection after you have been taking it for a few days, you should see your doctor. Your doctor may take a sample (swab) of the infected area (to determine the actual bacteria causing your symptoms). He or she may also change the antibiotic to a different one.

### **Yeast (candidal) and fungal infections**

These are usually treated with an antifungal cream. Treatment is usually needed for 3-6 months before the infection goes completely and a new healthy nail fold has formed.

Sometimes, a course of antifungal tablets for a week or so is given if the cream does not help. If the fungal infection has spread to your fingernails then treatment is needed for a longer period of time, usually 6-12 months. This is either by taking antifungal tablets or by using antifungal nail paint.

### **Prevention of recurrence of paronychia :**

- Do not bite your nails or pick at the skin next to nails.
- Keep your hands and feet dry as much as possible. Dry well after washing.
- Wear rubber gloves (preferably cotton-lined) if you work a lot with water.
- Do not wear gloves or artificial nails for long periods.