

*If you have
any questions
or concerns,
please ask your
physician or
nurse.*

Nail Changes During Chemotherapy

During chemotherapy, you may notice changes in your fingernails and toenails. These nail changes may begin anywhere from 3 to 6 weeks after you start chemotherapy. Your cuticles may fray and your nails may:

- Appear darker or yellow
- Become cracked and brittle
- Grow more slowly
- Break more easily
- Become dry in the area around the nail bed
- Lift off the nail bed

Your nails may also develop lines related to the cycles of your chemotherapy. These lines are not permanent and will grow out with your nails in about 6 months. Most of these changes do not last once your treatment is stopped.

What you can do

There are ways to take care of your nails to help prevent or ease some of these problems.

- Clip nails short.
- Do not rip, bite or peel off loose cuticles. Cut them carefully with a clean pair of nail scissors, or use cuticle remover cream or gel and push your cuticles back gently.
- Moisturize your hands and feet with thick creams or ointments.
- Massage cuticle cream into the cuticle area daily to help prevent dryness, splitting and hangnails.
- Do not bite your nails or cuticles. If this habit is difficult to break, try wearing thin, white cotton gloves at home to help you.
- Do not use fake nails or nail wraps because they can trap bacteria.
- Use nail polish only if your nails are healthy. If you use nail polish, use only non-acetone nail polish remover.
- If you get a manicure, bring your own clean tools to help protect against infection.
- Protect your nails by wearing gloves while doing chores around the house, such as washing dishes or gardening.
- Talk with your physician about taking biotin supplements for brittle nails.

For nail lifting

If your nail is loosening, lifting or separating from the skin underneath, keep the area clean. This will help prevent an infection under your nail. You may want to use a nail soak. To make the nail soak:

1. Mix 1 part distilled white vinegar with 2 parts water.
2. Soak your nails in the mixture 2 to 3 times a day for 5 to 10 minutes.

When to call your physician

Call your physician if you have any of these signs of infection:

- Tender or painful nails
- Fluid draining from your nails
- Redness or swelling in your nail bed
- Temperature of 100.4 degrees F or higher

If you have any questions or concerns, ask a member of your healthcare team. You may need to see a podiatrist (foot specialist) or a dermatologist (skin specialist) for further care and treatment.