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Treatment of ingrown toe nail by homoeopathic approach

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Abstract

In-grown toenail is an irritating lesion often encountered in clinical practice. It is largely a lesion of tight-fitting shoes, trauma in toes or poorly trimmed toenails among many other risk factors identified epidemiologically. Though not life threatening, in-grown toenail affects the quality of life by causing pain, limiting comfort and activity among those affected. Treatment may be conservative in the early stages but when recurrent or seen in late-stage, surgery offers a better and lasting outcome. In homoeopathy this condition can easily be treated without any surgical intervention, just by stimulating the body's natural restorative process.

Keywords: Ingrowing nails, homoeopathy, repertory, homoeopathic medicines, individualization

Introduction

Ingrown toenail, also known as onychocryptosis or unguis incarnatus, is the most common nail problem encountered in podiatry, general family practice, and dermatology. An ingrown toenail occurs when the nail plate grows into the periungual skin and causes inflammation and infection^[1]. It causes considerable pain, discomfort, and disability if left untreated. An individual's big toe is most likely to be affected. An ingrown toenail may present at any age, but most commonly it affects teenagers and young adults. Management options range from conservative treatments to extensive surgical approaches, depending on the severity and the stage of the condition^[2]. Generally, ingrown toenails can be treated at home, but the patients with a history of diabetes or problems related to poor blood circulation in the feet may need medical treatment.

Epidemiology

There have been few research on ingrown toenails. Previous reports have noted that the prevalence was as high as 2.5 to 5%^[3]. It seems that the incidence and prevalence of ingrown toenails are increasing these last years, probably due to increased health knowledge and may also be related to lifestyle changes such as important physical activities. Incidence peaks in adolescents and young adults with a clear male predominance (Male/Female ratio is approximately 2 to 1). It exclusively effect the hallux toenails. It can occur in one or both nail edges. Involvement of the lateral toe edge occurs twice as much as on the medial side.

Causes

1. Bad maintenance [like cutting the nail too short, rounded off at the tip or peeled off at the edges.
2. Ill-fitting shoes^[4]. [Those that are too narrow or too short can cause bunching of the toes in the developmental stages of the foot, causing the nail to curl and dig into the skin];
3. Trauma to the nail plate or toe.
4. Predisposition [abnormally shaped nail beds, nail deformities caused by diseases, and a genetic susceptibility to nail problems can mean a tendency to ingrowth.]

Risk Factors

The risk factors that can result in ingrown nail are.

- Diabetes.

- Obesity.
- Kidney problems.
- Heart problems (result in inflammation of the legs).
- Thyroid problems.
- Onychomycosis (fungal infection of nails).
- Soft or bony tumors of toes.
- Too small or too large shoe gear.
- Abnormal gait.
- Foot deformities including bunions, flat foot, hammertoes, congenital toenail deformity abnormally long toes.
- Hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating of feet).

Pathogenesis

Onychocryptosis mainly occurs when the lateral nail fold is penetrated by the edge of the nail plate, resulting in pain, sepsis and, later the formation of granulation tissue. Penetration is often caused by spicules of nail at the edge of the nail plate, which incite an inflammatory

response. The great toes are the most often affected [5]. The nail is not the real culprit, it is actually the excess skin surrounding the nail which is the real problem. A prospective study by Pearson and colleagues failed to demonstrate any abnormality of the nail in patients with symptomatic ingrown toenails, and suggested that treatment should not be based on the correction of a nonexistent nail deformity. The controversy of whether it is a nail plate abnormality or overgrown nail folds still exists.

Staging of ingrowing toenail

According to Heifitz the ingrown toenail are classified into 3 stages.

Stage I: Pain with mild erythema and swelling of the nail fold.

Stage II: increased swelling, sero-purulent discharge, and laceration of the nail-fold.

Stage III: Chronic inflammation with granulation and marked fold hypertrophy.

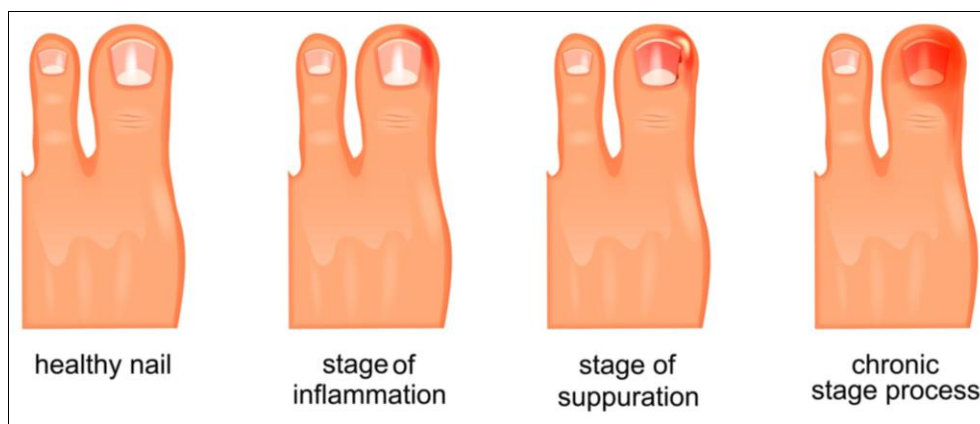


Fig 1: Onychocryptosis stage of ingrowth of the nail

Symptoms of ingrown toenails

The most common symptoms are

- The pain in the toe while applying pressure
- Skin becoming hard or swollen next to the nail
- Pus formation with bleeding in case of high infection
- Excess growth of the skin around the toe area
- The diagnosis may include a visual examination of the affected area followed by an X-ray to confirm the extent of growth of the nail into the skin.

Differential diagnosis

Differential diagnosis includes

- Subungual exostosis
- Primary osteomyelitis of the phalanx
- Subungual melanoma

Complications

- Paronychia or secondary infection of the nail fold
- Scarring of the nail fold and skin and rarely, cellulitis and osteomyelitis can occur.

If left untreated

- If an ingrown toenail is left untreated, there exists a high risk of dangerous infection. When the skin around the nail gets infected, it begins to swell up and put even more pressure against the nail. Ingrown nails can produce a spear shaped wedge of nail on the lateral side of the toe which will progressively become more

- embedded into the toe tissue as the nail grows forward.
- In the worst case, the swelling will begin putting sideways pressure on the nail, causing it to grow at a slant. This will cause both sides of the nail to eventually become ingrown and swollen. Eventually the swollen parts of the skin will begin to harden and fold over the nail. An untreated ingrown toenail will cause a person to walk with a limp, which over a long period of time may cause further pain and injury to the foot, leg and back owing to improper distribution of weight.
- Other non-direct effects of seriously ingrown nails include lack of exercise, constant and unrelenting pain and pressure which is often extreme and debilitating when weight has been on the foot for an extended period of time, the spread of infection, loss of appetite, inability to move around, and psychological effects (like anxiety, stress and feelings of despair).

Significance of nails in homoeopathy

1. Observation of nails should be part of the complete examination of a patient. It can rapidly indicate the diagnosis
2. Feel the warmth, the cold, the calmness and dryness by touching it. And also turn their hands over to accurately observe the morphology and to test their reaction, then look at each fingernail and toenail [6].
3. Changes in the finger nails represent the actual pathology of the patient, whereas changes at the level of

the toe nail indicate their heredity. The thumb and the big toe are characteristic of the personality and they often show a specific familial morphology.

4. The teeth, finger nails, the toe nails, the ear and the body hair and hair of the head, all contain the same elements that are found in animal horn. They survive long after death - salt builds them, sulphur nourishes them and mercury destroys them the nail is a living tissue which the neighboring powers and organism are revealed. This is a centrifugal physiological process that slows down during the acute illness, the nail blade develops through keratinization of the epithelial cells of the nail bed that produce localized depressions in the blade.
5. Finally the third part of the nail is with a free edge more or less in the form of a claw and reminds us of its past use as a tool and weapon today replaced by its aesthetic value. The dermis known as nail mantle underlies the nail like rest of the dermis it possess sudoriferous and sebaceous glands and nerve papillae ^[7]. The nail constitutes a hard protective surface that maintains a counter pressure giving the digital pulp its sensitivity and fineness, it is an organ of reception and emission towards the sky while the soft parts of the fingers remain in contact with the ground.
6. In early child hood the growth of the nail is very slow 0.08-0.10/day. From the age of 8 years old the growth of the nail accelerates until it reaches a maximum of 0.12-0.14 / day and remains at this rate until about the age of 50. After menopause and andropause, the growth of the nails slows down.
7. As a rule men's nails are more robust and larger than those of the women very rapid growth of the nail suggests hyperthyroidism ^[8]. All nail troubles can benefit from organotherapy particularly the nutrition of the nail dependent on the nervous and endocrine systems. Termination of nerve networks are situated in the skin fold at the point of origin of the nails and correspond meridian points of acupuncture.
8. The energy of the liver, which has a centrifugal movements extends right up to the heart and controls the nails. In liver and heart patients the nail becomes thinner and more fragile and the lung and kidney patients thicker and harder.

Examination of nails

Examination of the nails should be done in every patient. The normal nail expresses harmony between the dimensions of the hand and the rest of the body. The form of nails on the rest of the four limbs reveal the constitutional mosaic ^[9]. It can be modified in acute affections such as mycosis and chronic conditions a cardio respiratory insufficiency that can be lead to clubbing of the fingers. Certain basic rules can be applied when using the nails to make a diagnosis, but also look into the physical, psychic and emotional aspects of patients.

Rubrics from different repertory

Alphabetic repertory of nail disorders by Hering

Alphabetic nail repertory is a small effort to explore verified symptoms of guiding symptoms of our Materia Medica and modern supplementary work to Knerr's repertory ^[10]. This quick and handy reference in form of repertory will be a good helper to crack cases of nail disorders quickly with

verified data and useful guide to learn objective signs of nail with their corresponding homeopathic medicines. They are as follows.

In-Growing, Nail - Alum., Anan., Calen., CAUST., Teucr., Plum.

- **Toe nail:** THUJ.
- **Ulcers:** in-growing toe nail causes - Calen., TEUCR., NIT-AC.
- Great toe with ulceration (R) - TEURC.
- Moving, > - TEUCR.
- Purulent discharge with unhealthy granulation - Sang

Kent Repertory

Extremities - Ingrowing toe nail: Mag. aust. Sil. Graph. Teucr.

Caust. Nat. m. Nit.ac. Ph.ac. Sulph. Thuj., Alum., colch, kali. carb., kali. Chl., plb., tub.

- Ulceration with: Nit.ac., SIL., teucr.
- Unhealthy granulation, with: Lach., sang ^[11].

Boericke Repertory

Nails and their abnormalities found in the Boericke Repertory ^[12] under the Section SKIN rubric - Nails - Affections,

Some important rubrics are

- Affections in general - Ant.c. Graph. Sil. Alum. Castor.eq. Hyper. Nit.ac. Upas. X-ray.
- Inflammation - Around root (paronychia) - Dios; Nat.s, Alum., Bufo., Calc-s., Graph., Hep.
- Ingrowing toe nail- SIL. Caust., M-aust., Nit-ac., Staph., Ter., Teucr.
- Pain, splinter like, beneath toe nail - Fl.ac
- Pains, ulcerative beneath toe nail - Ant.c; Graph; Teucr.

Synthesis Repertory

Extremities - Nails; complaints of - ingrowing toenails ^[13]. Graph., M- aust., Sil., Teucr., Ant. crud., Caust., Lach., Nat. mur., Nit.ac., Ph-ac., Sul-i., Sulph., Thuj.,Alum., alum-p., alumn., bufo., calc., colch., fl-ac., hep., kali.c., kali-chl., kali.mur., lyc., mag-p., phos., plb., sang., sep., staph., tet., tub.

Management of ingrown toe nail

Conservative Measures

- Soaking the foot in warm, soapy water 2-3 times a day helps in keeping the area clean and free of bacteria. This can be very beneficial in softening the skin of the affected area, which can make it easier to draw out the toenail from the skin.
- Direct application of apple cider vinegar diluted with purified water or foot soak in warm water with a quarter cup of apple cider vinegar can help in conditioning ingrown nails to fight bacteria ^[14].
- Avoiding heels, tight shoes and wearing comfortable footwear can reduce down the pressure on the affected area. This can promote fast healing of the affected area.
- Use of Essential oils such as tea tree oil, lavender oil can provide natural pain relief from an ingrown nail ^[15] by ultimately giving affected area a healthy environment to heal. This may also help in remarkable reduction of inflammation.

Can homeopathic medication help in the treatment of ingrown toenails?

YES, Homoeopathy can.

Although this is a surgical condition, the treatment with homeopathic medicines in initial stages of Ingrown Toenails yields very good result [16]. Homeopathic medicines can easily cure the pain and the swelling of the nail bed and surrounding tissues. However, once the ingrown nail is trimmed, the medicines can prevent the nail from growing inwards, reduce or cure the inflammation and heal the fold of skin growing over the nail.

Homoeopathic medicines

“Totality of the symptoms”. The symptoms listed.

There is no specific remedy for abnormalities of the nails. The selection of medicine should be according to the general symptoms and constitutional indications. There are so many remedies in our homeopathic Materia Medica [17] which can cure the underlying cause of the disease which are the reasons for producing such abnormal nail. Here some commonly used medicines are.

1. **Alumina:** Panarium, with brittle nails, lancinating pains and tendency to ulceration of finger tips. Nails brittle and thick; spots on nails.
2. **Antimonium Crudum:** Painful sensibility of the skin under the nail, and slow growth of the nails themselves. A horny growth under the nail. Callous excrescence under the nail of the great toe. Finger nails do not grow as rapidly as formerly and skin beneath nails painfully sensitive.
3. **Apis Mellifica:** Panaritium with burning, stinging and throbbing, very sensitive to touch.
4. **Arsenicum Album:** Nails discolored; at first red, then black; later replaced by new nails, thin and transparent. Blue nails. Crumbling, mis-shaped toe nails.
5. **Bufo Rana:** Panaritium; pain runs up arm. Pustules, suppuration from every slight injury.
6. **Causticum:** Panaritium and paronychia. Warts on tip of finger. Fleshy warts close to nails. Crippled nails on toes, and in growing toenails. Crippled nails on finger and toes.
7. **Dioscorea:** Panaritium, early when are sharp and agonizing or when pricking is felt; nails brittle, disposition to paronychia. Nails seem unusually brittle. Felons, in beginning, when pricking in first felt.
8. **Floricum Acidum:** Whitlow; Panaritium; also, simple onychia, ulceration having set in. Nails grow more rapidly. Sensation of a splinter under nail. Brittleness of the nail. Panaritium; also, simple onychia.
9. **Graphites:** Finger nails become thick. Finger nails black and rough, matrix inflamed with soreness, and numbness, no suppuration < from water. Thick and crippled toe nails. Hypertrophied nail of left big toe; it was formed almost like a horn, and so hard that only by repeated and long continued operation with a file it could be diminished. Pain in nail of great toe. Ingrowing toe nails.
10. **Hepar Sulphur:** Whitlow in palmer surface of ungula phalanx of right thumb.
11. **Lachesis:** Cracks in corner of the nails. Ingrowing toe nail along with hemorrhage. Throbbing “gathering pain” accelerates suppuration. Whitlow occurring every winter for several year. Superficial erysipalatus inflammation around root of Lachesis mutus: Whitlow with necrosis of tendon and much discoloration. Right index finger atrophied; fetid sanious discharge from beneath nails; integument about root of nail, tawny brown, bordering upon purple in parts. Onychia Falon with proud flesh.
12. **Ledum Palustre:** Consequences of injuries to nails in the first stage. After tearing of hang nail, whitlow rapidly forming on palmer surface of right index finger; intense throbbing, swelling, redness and acute darting pain.
13. **Magnetis Polus Australis:** It is indicated when there is an extreme pain in the ingrown toenail coupled with sharp, pulsating pain and intense soreness around the affected part.
14. **Mercurious Solubilis:** Exfoliation of finger nails. Ulceration at the nails - Deadness of finger.
15. **Natrum Mur:** Asleep sensation and crawling in fingers. Numerous hangnails.
16. **Natrium Sulphuricum:** Paronychia; patient pale and feeble in morning, chills and heat; after a blister, filled with water, which came on last phalanx, swollen all around, very and painful; Matter around root of nail; pain more bearable outdoor than in room, damp walls. Inflammation and suppuration around roots of nails. Tingling, ulcerative pain under nail; in tips of finger.
17. **Nitricum Acidum:** Intense redness and swelling on one or both sides of nail great sensitiveness to touch and pressure; yellow stripe on edge of nails, threatening suppuration, Paronychia. Ingrowing toe nails; nail seems to have grown into flash, but in reality, has not, very sore, with more or less ulceration and feeling as if sharp splinter was being stuck into part on contact. Cold blue nails.
18. **Sepia Officinalis:** Whitlow for six or seven days; last joint of right thumb finger inflamed, swollen and itches with throbbing shooting and burning in it, the part is dark red and pus invisible. Painless ulcers on tips of finger. Crumbling misshapen toe nails. Deformed nails.
19. **Silicea Terra:** Whitlow; Panaritium; lancinating pains; inflammations extend deep to tendons and cartilages and bones. Run-around; ulcerations about nails, hang-nails. Rough, yellow, crippled, brittles; white spots; blue in fever; stimulates growth of new ones. Ingrowing toe nails.
20. **Sulphur:** Hangnails. Panaritium affecting thumb: great swelling and inflammation, formation of pus around and beneath nail; intolerable throbbing and boring pains < at night. Whitlow. Ulcers about nails. Flaws in nails, hang-nails.
21. **Teucrium Marum Verum:** It is commonly known as Cat Thyme. It helps in treating ingrown toenail successfully when accompanied by a suppurated toenail.
22. **Thuja Occidentalis:** Toe nails: brittles and distorted; crumbling, misshapen; Ingrowing toe nails. Nails of fingers and toes become wavy and dry so that they partly crumble. Nails crippled, brittle, discolored or soft; numerous hangnails.

Conclusion

Homeopathy treats the patient as a whole. The homoeopathic medicines are selected after full individualization, the case analysis include personal history, past medical history, physical and mental general

constitution, family history underlying pathology of the presenting complaints, exciting cause and miasmatic tendency^[18]. Abnormal nails, tongue, hair, skin texture etc. are also observe during case taking which help the homeopathic physician to estimate the underlying cause and help in treating the miasmatic background of the patients. Sometime patient may present nail complaints as main presenting feature like brittle nails, paronychia, onycholysis, melanonychia or hemorrhage. In those cases prescription must be according to the exciting factor as well as symptoms similarity.

Homeopathy, as a science, rest fundamentally upon four general principles: Similarity, Contrariety, Proportionality and Infinitesimality. Keen observation skills are a critical key to successful homeopathic practice. Hippocrates introduced clinical approach for first time. He said that art of clinical observation should be the necessary basis for pathological diagnosis.

Hahnemann Went ahead and completed the idea. He said for all practical purpose, the totality of the symptoms is the only guide, the true guide responsible for diagnosis and remedy selection.

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