

NAIL DISCOLOURATION

WHAT IS IT

When something is wrong, one visible clue is nail discolouration. Healthy nails have a pinkish hue and are evenly coloured. Abnormal colouring varies depending on the cause, which may be a problem affecting the nails or a condition somewhere else in the body.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- **Yellow:** Nails can become yellowed due to lymphedema (build-up of lymphatic fluid in tissues), lung disease or psoriasis.
- **Green:** What is known as “green nail syndrome” is often caused by a type of fungal infection called *Pseudomonas*.
- **Brown:** Nails may become stained brown from nicotine use, nail polish or even chemotherapy.
- **Purple:** Bruising due to injury can turn part of a nail purple. Red or purple streaks can also result from a splinter hemorrhage (a little bit of bleeding that occurs under the nail).
- **Blue:** Nails can turn blue as a result of taking minocycline (antibiotic) and from several other oral medications.
- **Black:** Usually from a pseudomonas infection, black nails can also be due to severe bruising. Some patients with darker skin tones may also experience uniform darkening or dark lines within nail with age. However, a subungual melanoma (see “Subungual melanoma” for information) must always be considered with black discoloration of nails.
- **White:** White nails can be hereditary or a sign of low albumin (protein deficiency). White streaks may develop from trauma to the nail. Nails can also fade and turn white from vitiligo, which is a skin condition caused by a loss of pigmentation.

Additional information on Nail
Discolouration is available online.

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BRITTLE NAILS

WHAT IS IT

Onychoschizia means brittle, splitting, soft or thin nails. It is a common problem that is often more prevalent in women and usually occurs with aging.



CAUSES

While nail abnormalities can rarely be linked to illness (iron deficiency and thyroid disease most commonly), most cases of brittle nails arise from causes such as overexposure to water, harsh soap and detergents as well as overuse of nail polish and manicures. Repeated wetting and drying makes nails expand and shrink, which leads to the brittle nails. Brittle nails can result from either being too dry or from overexposure to moisture. When nails become brittle due to too much moisture, nails can become soft and may peel. Repeated trauma to the nails can also cause splitting and softening.

MANAGING BRITTLE NAILS

- Avoid unnecessary exposure to water, wear rubber gloves when washing dishes and for general housecleaning
- Give nails a break from manicures, nail polish and nail polish remover
- Moisturize hands regularly
- Cut nails straight across or slightly rounded using sharp nail clippers or scissors
- Filing can also help by smoothing out ragged nails to prevent further damage. Just be sure to use a non-metal file and buff nails in the direction of nail growth only to prevent further splitting.
- Avoid nail biting and trauma to nails (i.e. using nails to open packaging)
- There is not sufficient evidence to recommend over the counter supplements such as Biotin for brittle nails. These supplements can also come with risks such as interfering with common blood tests.

Additional information on Brittle Nails is available online.

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