



ACUTE PARONYCHIA (INFLAMMATION OF THE NAIL FOLDS)

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about acute paronychia. It tells you what it is, what causes it and what can be done about it.

What is acute paronychia?

Acute paronychia is an infection of the nail folds (the skin surrounding the nail) that has been present for less than 6 weeks and it is the result of the barrier breakdown between the nail plate and the nail fold. The tight protective barrier between the nail plate and the cuticle / nail folds can be threatened by very frequent exposure to water, finger sucking in children, gardening, nail biting, nail tic and nail picking, nail manipulation / aggressive manicure and artificial nails. Usually the paronychia affects one finger, occurs soon after trauma and presents with all the signs of inflammation such as redness, swelling, tenderness, hot digit and pain.

What causes acute paronychia?

Acute paronychia commonly occurs after trauma (foreign body, manicure / pedicure, ingrown nails, nail biting) of the nail folds or as an acute infection of chronic paronychia (caused due to irritation of the nail folds). Trauma-induced paronychia is commonly caused by staphylococcus infection. Other bacteria have also been involved (*Streptococcus pyogenes*, *Pseudomonas pyocyanea*, *Proteus vulgaris*, *Herpes simplex* and the yeast, *Candida albicans*). Acute paronychia can also complicate a chronic paronychia, which is the chronic inflammation of the nail fold secondary to irritants and allergens. Certain drugs, like retinoids, HIV antiviral drugs, certain chemotherapy and immunosuppressive drugs, may also cause paronychia, whereas patients with diabetes are at increased risk of paronychia.

What does acute paronychia look like?

Redness, swelling and tenderness and pus are the main symptoms. Sometimes an abscess forms that needs to be treated quickly otherwise it may result in permanent changes to the nail.

How is acute paronychia diagnosed?

A skin swab is taken from the collection (fluid or pus)

How can acute paronychia be treated?

Your dermatologist will decide what is the best treatment for you:

1. Mild form (redness only without pus):
 - a. Use of warm water compresses plus soaking in vinegar solution
 - b. Antibiotic creams with / without topical steroids (inflammation of the nail folds is addressed better with the concurrent use of topical steroids)
 - c. Clotrimazole cream when candida is suspected

2. Persistent infections:
 - a. Adults: Oral antibiotics (anti-staphylococcal) and antibacterial soaks.
 - b. Children with finger sucking and adults with nail biting: broad-spectrum oral antibiotics i.e Augmentin or Clindamycin.

3. Drainage is also an option in severe cases (i.e abscess)

Self care (What can I do?)

Prevention: Dry affected fingers, avoid nail biting and manipulation.

Where can I get more information?

Web: <http://dermnetnz.org/topics/paronychia/>

**BRITISH HAIR AND NAIL SOCIETY PATIENT
INFORMATION LEAFLET PRODUCED JANUARY 2020**

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