

- Nails

PREVENTION

WELLNESS

5 MYTHS ABOUT

NAILS

We're not pointing any fingers (or toes), but a lot of folks (including manicurists!) are misinformed. Here's the unvarnished truth.

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TRUNK ARCHIVE.



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MYTH :

White marks on your nails mean you're not getting enough calcium.

MYTHBUSTER

Maybe, but probably not. The most common reason for white marks on your nails is minor injuries, says dermatologist Jenny Liu, M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Minnesota Medical School. You might hurt your nails by bumping them, using harsh chemicals, or getting an aggressive manicure. The white spots usually are harmless, Dr. Liu says, "and they grow out as the nail grows." If they don't go away or the nails thicken, crack, or separate, that's a sign that they're caused by something more serious, says Saylee Tulpule, M.D., a podiatrist in Washington, DC, and Maryland and a spokesperson for the American Podiatric Medical Association. Call your doctor, who might diagnose a fungal infection, an illness, or, yes, a deficiency of a nutrient such as calcium.

WELLNESS

**MYTH:**

Nail fungus is just a cosmetic issue.

MYTHBUSTER

Fungal nail infections can cause problems that go well beyond appearance. Left untreated, nail fungus can make nails deformed, cracked, or thick and hard to cut. The fungus is also very contagious. "It can spread to multiple nails and develop into a chronic nail infection, in which the entire nail plate and bed is infected," Dr. Tulpule says. In older adults, fungal infections can lead

to cellulitis and to foot ulcers in people with diabetes, the American Academy of Family Physicians reports. And while fungal nail infections are common, affecting 10% of people of all ages and 20% of those over 60, you can still try to avoid them: Wear shoes in public showers and locker rooms, keep nail clippers clean, dry your hands and feet thoroughly,

and wear well-fitting shoes. Mild cases may be helped by an over-the-counter antifungal cream, gel, or polish, says Dr. Liu. For moderate to severe infections, prescription or in-office treatments are more effective.



**MYTH:**

**Nail hardener
can fix brittle,
splitting nails.**

MYTHBUSTER

Nope. "At first your nails may feel harder," says Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist and the founder of Dr. Bailey Skin Care, "but eventually the chemicals end up damaging the structure of the nails, which leads to more splitting, cracking, and brittleness." Instead, treat brittle nails as you would dry skin and moisturize, moisturize, moisturize. Dr. Bailey recommends using a rich cream or ointment that has lanolin or glycerin. After washing and towel-drying your hands, apply the cream daily to "help keep nails pliable and prevent cracking," she says. It's also smart to keep your nails short and wear gloves when washing dishes.

WELLNESS

**MYTH:**

Trimming cuticles keeps nails healthy.

MYTHBUSTER

Just the opposite, in fact—cutting or roughly pushing back your cuticles can lead to infection. The cuticle acts like a barrier to stop germs from getting between your skin and the nail, and cutting the cuticles puts this seal at risk, Dr. Bailey says. Infections can

become bad enough to require antibiotics or even surgical drainage. The best way to care for your cuticles is to keep them moisturized with a quality hand cream or ointment, Dr. Bailey says. And while there's no health reason to push down your cuticles, if you want to do so for aesthetic reasons, soak them in warm water first and then push very gently.



WELLNESS

5

MYTH:**Nails need to breathe.****MYTHBUSTER****Nails are not living tissue:**

They're made up of a protein, keratin, that doesn't contain live cells, Dr. Liu says. As such, they don't need oxygen—they grow from the nail beds and get nutrients from your blood, not the air. Still, it's a good idea to take breaks from nail polish, nail enhancements, and manicures. Nail polish can dry nails out, and dark polish can temporarily stain nails if left on too long. Using acrylic or gel nails less often can also help (the removal process can damage natural nails). "Taking breaks every few weeks can help prevent issues like yellowing, brittleness, and peeling, which are often caused by harsh chemicals or prolonged polish wear," Dr. Liu adds.

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