

RUNNERS



DECEMBER 2001

MEDICAL & TRAINING



ADVICE

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Black and Blue

First aid for your toenails



Nail delivery: To keep your toenails healthy, make sure your toes don't rub the front of your running shoes.

After running a few weeks in a new pair of shoes, my second (and longest) toe started to hurt, and the nail eventually thickened and turned black. I've now noticed the same problem starting on the other foot. What can I do?
S.G., SAN FRANCISCO

This is a common problem that's relatively easy to treat at home. About a third of the U.S. population inherits a long second toe (a condition called Morton's Toe). This predisposes you to "runner's nail," which occurs when your toe rubs against the inside of your running shoe. This repetitive trauma can damage the nail root, leading to a fungal infection that causes the nail to thicken and turn black.

Here's what to do: After showering or soaking your feet in warm soapy water, thin the nail by rubbing it with a pumice stone. Cut the nail short so it's less vulnerable to irritation. Then apply an over-the-counter liquid antifungal product available at your local pharmacy (I prefer Fungoid Tincture or Dr. Scholl's Fungi Solution). You'll know this is working if the new growth at the base of the nail comes back normally.

If the problem persists, ask your doctor for a topical prescription solution called Penlac. For a really stubborn case, your doctor may recommend an oral prescription antifungal medicine such as Lamisil or Sporanox. And, the next time you buy shoes, consider a slightly larger pair (half a size should do it). You should be able to wiggle your toes without having them rub the tips of your shoes.
—Richard Braver, D.P.M., runner and sports podiatrist in Englewood, Fair Lawn, and Wayne, N.J., and RW Science Advisory Board member

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Reconstructive Foot & Ankle Surgery
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24 Grand Avenue, Englewood, NJ 07631
Fax (201) 569-3526
(201) 569-7672
E-mail: DrRun@aol.com

24 Fair Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
(201) 791-1881

Route 25 South, Suite 200, Riverdale, NJ 07075
(973) 831-1774

Please forward all correspondence to the Englewood Address
WEBSITE: WWW.DRRUN.COM

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