

Ingrown Toenail Treatment in Secondary Care Criteria Based Access

Before consideration of referral for management in secondary care, please review advice on the Remedy website (www.remedy.bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/) or consider use of advice and guidance services where available

Section A - Criteria

A referral to secondary care for the removal of ingrowing toenails will only be funded if ALL of the following criteria are met:

- The referrals can only be made by the community podiatry service.
- Clinical condition precludes treatment in the community or inability to cooperate with the service because of the pre-existing condition e.g. Autism, intolerance of local anaesthetic, ulceration, vascular problems. (These are examples and not a definitive list)

BRAN

For any health-related decision, it is important to consider “BRAN” which stands for:

- Benefits
- Risks
- Alternatives
- Do Nothing

Benefits

Ingrown nail surgery offers several benefits, particularly for people experiencing recurring or severe ingrown toenails. Here are some of the main advantages:

1. **Pain Relief:** Surgery provides immediate relief from the pain and tenderness associated with ingrown nails, especially when they have become infected or inflamed.
2. **Reduced Risk of Infection:** Ingrown nails can easily become infected, especially when treated improperly or left untreated. Surgery removes the problematic portion of the nail, reducing the chances of infection and allowing the affected area to heal.
3. **Permanent Solution:** For chronic cases, surgery often includes partial or full removal of the nail root (matrixectomy) to prevent the nail from growing back incorrectly, offering a long-term or even permanent fix.
4. **Improved Mobility and Comfort:** Relieving the pressure and discomfort from an ingrown nail can make walking, exercising, and wearing shoes more comfortable, improving mobility and overall quality of life.
5. **Faster Healing and Recovery:** Surgery can promote quicker healing by directly addressing the underlying cause of the ingrown nail, leading to faster recovery compared to repeated home or non-surgical treatments.
6. **Enhanced Appearance:** Ingrown nails can sometimes appear swollen, red, or infected. Surgical treatment can help restore a healthier and more natural appearance to the toe.
7. **Lower Recurrence Rates:** By correcting the growth pattern of the nail, surgery can reduce the likelihood of the issue recurring, offering peace of mind and preventing future discomfort.

Overall, ingrown nail surgery is a safe and effective solution that can provide lasting relief and prevent ongoing issues with the affected toe.

Risks

Ingrown nail surgery is generally safe and effective, but like any medical procedure, it comes with some potential risks. Here are the main ones:

1. **Infection:** Although the surgery is done under sterile conditions, there is still a risk of infection at the surgical site. Proper post-operative care and hygiene can help minimize this risk.
2. **Pain and Discomfort:** Some pain, swelling, and tenderness are common after the surgery. While this typically resolves as the area heals, some individuals may experience prolonged discomfort.
3. **Bleeding and Swelling:** Minor bleeding is common immediately after surgery, and some swelling may occur as the toe heals. In rare cases, excessive bleeding or persistent swelling may occur.
4. **Recurrence:** In some cases, even after surgery, the ingrown nail can regrow improperly, causing the problem to return. Additional treatment or surgery may be necessary if recurrence occurs.
5. **Nail Deformity:** If the procedure involves partial or complete removal of the nail matrix, the nail may grow back with an irregular shape or appearance, or it may not grow back at all.
6. **Allergic Reaction:** Rarely, patients may experience an allergic reaction to local anesthesia used during the procedure.
7. **Nerve Damage:** In rare cases, the surgery can damage nerves in the toe, potentially leading to numbness or tingling.
8. **Delayed Healing:** Certain health conditions, such as diabetes or poor circulation, can delay healing, potentially increasing the risk of complications.

While these risks exist, ingrown nail surgery is generally low-risk, with most complications being mild and manageable.

Removing one ingrown toenail does not necessarily prevent a person from developing future ingrown toenails. In some cases, a person might need another surgery or even multiple surgeries.

A person may develop an infection following surgery. Surgery creates an open wound that makes it easier for bacteria and other pathogens to enter the body. It is important to see a doctor for any signs of infection following surgery because untreated infections can seriously damage the toe or lead to amputations.

A person may have trouble waking up from general anaesthesia or have an adverse reaction — such as an allergic reaction — to local anaesthesia.

A person may have an allergic reaction to some of the surgical equipment. People with a latex allergy should disclose this information to the medical team.

Alternatives

There are several alternatives to ingrown nail surgery that may effectively relieve pain and prevent infection, especially for mild to moderate cases. Here are some common options:

1. **Soaking and Foot Hygiene:** Soaking the affected foot in warm, soapy water or Epsom salts a few times daily can soften the skin and reduce inflammation, helping the nail grow out naturally. Good foot hygiene also prevents infection.
2. **Over-the-Counter Pain Relievers:** Pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help manage discomfort and reduce swelling, though they don't treat the underlying cause.
3. **Topical Antibiotics:** Applying an antibiotic ointment to the affected area can help prevent or treat mild infections, especially when the nail hasn't deeply embedded into the skin.
4. **Lifting the Nail:** For early-stage ingrown nails, a healthcare provider or podiatrist may gently lift the edge of the nail and place a small piece of cotton or dental floss underneath to help guide the nail to grow outward, away from the skin.
5. **Nail Braces:** A nail brace, also known as an orthonyx, can be applied by a podiatrist to gently lift and correct the nail's curvature as it grows. This non-surgical method is effective for many people, particularly for those with recurring ingrown nails.
6. **Corrective Nail Trimming:** A professional podiatrist can trim the nail to prevent further irritation. Correct trimming at home—cutting the nail straight across instead of rounding the edges—can also reduce the risk of developing an ingrown nail.
7. **Wider or Open-Toed Footwear:** Wearing properly fitting shoes with a wide toe box can relieve pressure on the nail and reduce irritation. Open-toed shoes may also help while the nail is healing.
8. **Orthotics:** For people with structural foot issues that contribute to ingrown toenails, custom orthotics may help by redistributing weight and pressure on the feet, reducing irritation around the nail.

These alternatives may be effective for mild cases, but if the ingrown nail is severe, recurring, or infected, surgery might still be the best option for long-term relief.

Do Nothing

If an ingrown toenail is left untreated and no surgery or other intervention is pursued, several issues may arise, especially if the condition worsens over time. Here's what could happen:

1. **Increased Pain and Discomfort:** As the nail continues to grow into the surrounding skin, pain and tenderness will likely worsen. Simple activities like walking, standing, or wearing shoes can become increasingly uncomfortable.
2. **Swelling and Redness:** Chronic irritation from the nail pressing into the skin can cause ongoing inflammation, leading to swelling, redness, and heat around the toe.
3. **Infection:** Ingrown nails often create a break in the skin where bacteria can enter, leading to infections. An infected ingrown toenail may produce pus, feel warm to the touch, and appear red or swollen. Severe infections may even spread to surrounding skin (cellulitis) or, in rare cases, to the bone (osteomyelitis).

4. **Granulation Tissue Formation:** When an ingrown nail is left untreated, the body sometimes responds by creating extra tissue, known as granulation tissue, at the site. This tissue is red and swollen and can make the nail area more painful and difficult to clean.
5. **Chronic Inflammation and Scarring:** Long-term inflammation can cause scarring around the nail bed, which may lead to deformity of the toe and worsen future episodes of ingrown nails.
6. **Impact on Mobility and Daily Activities:** Persistent pain and inflammation can significantly impact your ability to walk, exercise, and perform daily tasks comfortably, potentially lowering your quality of life.
7. **Risk of Serious Complications in Certain Individuals:** For people with underlying health conditions like diabetes, poor circulation, or compromised immunity, an untreated ingrown toenail can lead to more severe complications. Poor blood flow or sensation in the feet, for example, can increase the risk of serious infection or slow healing.

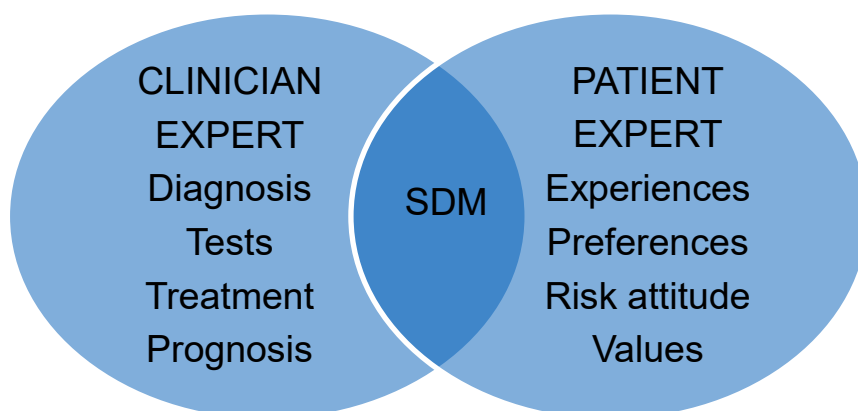
While some minor ingrown toenails can be managed without intervention, more severe cases or those left untreated for extended periods can lead to complications that may eventually require medical attention.

If the nail is causing pain or discomfort this may continue, without surgical intervention.

Shared Decision Making

If a person fulfils the criteria for Ingrown Toenail treatment, it is important to have a partnership approach between the person and the clinician.

Shared Decision Making (SDM) is the meeting of minds of two types of experts:



It puts people at the centre of decisions about their own treatment and care and respects what is unique about them. This includes their preferences and values. It means that people receiving care and clinicians delivering care can understand what is important to the other person.

The person and their clinician may find it helpful to use 'Ask 3 Questions':

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for **me**?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for **me**?

Ingrown Toenail Treatment in Secondary Care – Plain Language Summary

An ingrown toenail occurs when the edge of the nail grows into the surrounding skin, causing pain, redness, and sometimes infection. If initial treatments (like warm water soaks, pain relievers, and home care) aren't effective, you may be referred to a healthcare provider in secondary care (like a podiatrist or specialist).

In secondary care, treatment options may include:

1. **Lifting or Splinting the Nail:** The provider might gently lift the nail edge and place a small piece of cotton or a tiny splint underneath. This helps guide the nail to grow away from the skin.
2. **Partial Nail Removal:** If lifting doesn't work or the ingrown nail is more severe, the provider may remove part of the nail. This is often done with a local anesthetic to prevent pain.
3. **Matrixectomy (Root Removal):** For chronic or recurring ingrown nails, the provider may remove part of the nail root. This can prevent that section of the nail from growing back and usually stops the problem from coming back.
4. **Aftercare:** Following treatment, the toe will need regular cleaning and protection. The healthcare provider may apply a dressing to keep the area clean, and you might be prescribed antibiotic ointment or oral antibiotics if there is an infection.
5. **Pain Relief and Healing:** After treatment, there may be some pain, swelling, and tenderness as the area heals. Pain relievers, proper hygiene, and follow-up care are recommended.

Secondary care treatment is generally effective and safe, with most patients finding lasting relief from ingrown toenail problems.

This policy has been developed with the aid of the following references:

1. NICE (2024) Paronychia Acute (Clinical Knowledge Summary) www.nice.org.uk
2. National Health Service (2022) Health A to Z: Ingrown Toenail [online] www.nhs.uk/conditions
3. Royal College of Podiatry (2024) Ingrowing Toenail [online]
4. Mayo Clinic (2022) Ingrown Toenails [Online] www.mayoclinic.org
5. Patient Information (2024) Ingrown Toenails www.patient.info

Connected Policies

Forefoot Surgery in Secondary Care

Due regard

In carrying out their functions, the Bristol North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Commissioning Policy Review Group (CPRG) are committed to having due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), and NHSE Evidence-Based Interventions (EBI). This applies to all the activities for which the ICB's are responsible, including policy development and review.

Document Control

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Governance

Commissioning policies are assessed for their likely level of impact on BNSSG ICB and the population for which it is responsible. This determines the appropriate level of sign off. The below described the approval route for each score category.

Policy Category	Approval By
Level 1	Commissioning Policy Review Group
Level 2	Chief Medical Officer, or Chief Nursing Officer, or System Executive Group Chair
Level 3	ICB Board

OPCS Procedure codes

Must have any of (primary only): W798

Support

If you would like further copies of this policy or need it in another format, such as Braille or another language, please contact the Customer Services Team on: 0117 900 2655 or 0800 073 0907 or email them on BNSSG.customerservice@nhs.net.