

## What Your Fingernails Reveal about Your Health

You may see your hands hundreds of times a day, but do you ever examine them? Probably not. Yet taking a closer look – especially at our fingernails – may not be a bad idea. They’re a good indicator of overall health.

Spoon-shaped nails, for example, may simply be an inherited trait – or they can be a clue to a thyroid deficiency or iron deficiency anemia. Nails that have no “moon” or white crescent at the base and are thin and brittle might indicate an underactive thyroid. Still other changes – like brittleness or pitting – may be signs of other nutritional deficiencies or injury to the nail bed. While no one can diagnose a health problem on the basis of nail irregularities only, the table on next page may tip you off to possible health problems. (Consult your doctor if you see any significant changes in your nails.)

Barring any medical explanation for nail problems, the following tips can help your nails look healthier and more attractive.

- Eat a well-balanced diet that includes plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and low-fat dairy products.
- Wear gloves when you do household chores or hobbies to avoid contact with detergents or harsh chemicals that can dry or damage nails.
- Clean nails with a nail brush, especially if you garden or work with messy materials. Clip cuticles and rough skin to prevent tears. File nails in one direction only. Use an emery board, not a metal nail file.
- Don’t use your nails as tools, such as to remove staples.
- If you polish your nails, use polish remover sparingly.

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## Nail Symptoms and What They Could Mean

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<b>Problem</b>	<b>Possible Causes</b>
Brittleness	Frequent immersion in hot water; generally poor health; impaired circulation; possible deficiency of vitamins A, C, B <sub>6</sub> , or niacin, deficiency of calcium or iron; thyroid deficiency
Clubbing	Chronic lung disease or lung cancer; congenital heart disease; congenital or hereditary defect
Pitting (may be normal)	Eczema; psoriasis; trauma
Ridges	Emphysema; heredity; kidney failure; old age; rheumatoid arthritis, traumas
Separation (when nail plate lifts off nail bed)	Allergy to nail lacquer and hardeners; fungal infection; iron deficiency anemia; pregnancy; psoriasis; trauma
Splitting at top edge	Immersion in water for long periods, nail polish removers
Spoon shaped	Thyroid deficiency; iron deficiency anemia

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