

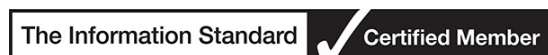
# Patient Information for Consent

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## GS16 Surgery for Ingrowing Toenail (adult)

Expires end of March 2019

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## What is an ingrowing toenail?

An ingrowing toenail happens when your toenail grows into the skin around it (see figure 1). The skin can get damaged, causing infection and pain. The problem usually happens to your big toe.



Figure 1  
An ingrown toenail

Your doctor has recommended an operation to treat your ingrowing toenail. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your doctor or the healthcare team.

## How does an ingrowing toenail happen?

The most common cause of an ingrowing toenail is not cutting your toenails properly, by cutting them too short or down the sides of your toenail. The problem often runs in families as a common cause is having toenails that do not grow straight.

Wearing shoes that do not have enough width to fit your toes in their natural position can also cause an ingrowing toenail.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

You should no longer have infection and pain.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Try to cut your toenails straight across and do not leave sharp edges. Wear shoes that comfortably fit the shape of your feet.

Keep your feet clean. Soak your feet in warm water a few times a day to soften the skin.

Your GP or podiatrist (a specialist in treating problems of the lower legs and feet) may be able to push the skin away from the ingrowing toenail or cut away the piece of toenail that has grown into the skin.

If your toe gets infected, you may need antibiotics but this will not treat your ingrowing toenail.

## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

An ingrowing toenail is not life-threatening but the problem tends to get worse with time, causing infection, pain and difficulty walking.

## What does the operation involve?

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct side. You can help by confirming to your doctor and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

The operation is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. Your doctor will inject local anaesthetic into your toe and usually place a tourniquet (tight strap) around the base of your toe. Your doctor will begin the operation only when both of you are satisfied that the local anaesthetic is working. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection.

The operation usually takes about 10 minutes and may involve one or more of the following techniques.

- Nail avulsion – Removing your whole toenail. Your toenail will regrow.
- Wedge excision – Removing part of your toenail where it is growing into the skin, along with the area of tissue in the corner that your toenail grows from (see figure 2). Your toenail will regrow but will be narrower than before.



Figure 2  
A wedge excision

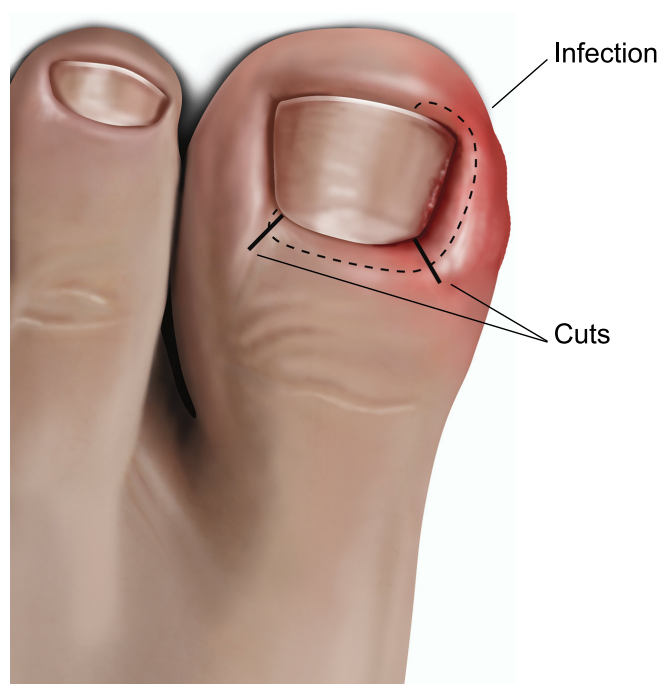


Figure 3  
A Zadek's procedure

- **Nail-bed ablation** – Removing part of your toenail or your whole toenail and then applying a chemical (usually phenol) or an electric current to the area of tissue that your toenail grows from. This will prevent your toenail from growing back in the area that was treated.
- **Zadek's procedure** – Removing your whole toenail and then cutting away the area of tissue that your toenail grows from (see figure 3).

This will prevent your toenail from growing back.

## What should I do about my medication?

Let your doctor know about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

## What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the operation may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound.

- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation.
- Keep warm around the time of the operation. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.

## What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make the operation as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious.

You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

## Complications of anaesthesia

Your doctor or anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

## General complications of any operation

- **Pain.** The healthcare team will give you medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as you are told so you can move about as advised.

- Bleeding during or after the operation. You will usually have a tourniquet around your toe during the operation, so there is usually little bleeding. Bleeding can cause the dressing to stick to your toenail bed.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin, if your doctor uses the wedge excision technique.

## Specific complications of this operation

- Infection of the surgical site (wound) (risk: 1 in 8). The risk is higher if your doctor uses phenol. It is usually safe to shower after two days but you should check with the healthcare team. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need another operation.
- Infection in the underlying bone (osteomyelitis) (risk: less than 1 in 100). An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need another operation.

## How soon will I recover?

### In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area.

You will have a thick, padded bandage on your foot. Keep your foot raised so that the swelling settles. Your doctor will tell you if you need to have any stitches removed.

After a short while you will be able to go home. Open toe shoes will be more comfortable and will allow room for the dressing.

A responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

### Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination.

If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

Spend most of the time during the first few days with your leg raised so that the swelling settles. After that, you can usually start to be a little more active.

You may need to have your dressings changed to check the skin is healing and to remove any stitches.

If your toe bleeds, press firmly on your wound for 15 to 20 minutes and then gradually release the pressure. Keep your foot raised.

Do not play sports or do strenuous exercise for two weeks. Keep the dressing dry.

Your doctor will tell you when you can return to normal activities.

Do not wear safety boots for at least a month.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

## The future

Try to cut your toenails straight across and do not leave sharp edges.

Wear shoes that fit the shape of your feet comfortably.

An ingrowing toenail can happen again (risk: less than 1 in 10 if phenol is used). You may need another operation.

## Summary

Surgery to remove an ingrowing toenail should take away infection and pain.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

#### **Acknowledgements**

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