People over 55 years or older
People with diminished blood circulation
People with previous or existing injury or infection of the nail
People with a weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS, diabetes)

What causes toenail fungus infections?
Toenail infections are most often caused by a fungus. The fungus usually invades the nail at the free edge and then spreads down the side towards the base. The fungi thrive in warm, moist conditions commonly associated with wearing shoes and socks.

This organism can also lead to fungal infections of the skin. Toenail fungus infections are contagious and can be transferred from person to person, as well as from one toenail to another.

Who is at risk of toenail fungus infections?
Although everyone is potentially susceptible, there are several risk factors that make a person more likely to get infected.

- People over 55 years or older
- People with diminished blood circulation
- People with previous or existing injury or infection of the nail
- People with a weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS, diabetes)

Walking barefoot in public areas, like fitness studios, locker rooms, spas and swimming pools can increase the likelihood of contracting a fungal infection.

How can I prevent toenail fungus infections?
While it isn’t possible to eliminate the possibility of infection, there are steps you can take to reduce your chances of infection and recurrence.

- Keep feet clean and dry
- Avoid nail polish and acrylic nails (these prevent air from reaching the surface)
- Avoid walking barefoot in public showers, pools and locker rooms
- Change shoes and socks frequently
- Keep nails clipped short and straight across
- Wear well-fitting socks and shoes made of breathable materials
- Disinfect clippers and other instruments used to treat nails

What are the psychological and social impacts of toenail fungus infections?
Toenail fungus infections can be emotionally distressing and have a negative effect on quality of life. In a survey conducted by Leger Marketing, 50% of the Canadians surveyed said they avoided going barefoot or wearing sandals because of how their toenails look.

Many sufferers feel extremely self-conscious and embarrassed about their nails’ appearance especially during the summer when they are more visible.
2. Systemic or Oral Treatments

Oral treatments have a systemic effect, meaning the bloodstream carries the medication to the nail bed, without needing to bypass the tough nail plate. For severe toenail fungus infections that affect the nail root or matrix, oral treatments will often be required.

Because they absorb systemically, oral treatments can interact with other medications and can be toxic to the liver, so liver function needs to be monitored while taking oral antifungal medications.

3. Physical and Light Treatments

Parts of or the entire infected nail can be removed so that topical treatments can be applied directly to the affected part of the nail or nail bed. The procedure can be done in your physician’s office.

Lasers are a relatively new area where there may be potential for treating fungal infections but evidence suggests that laser treatment alone is not very effective and may need to be used in combination with other therapies.

Available oral and topical prescription treatments for toenail fungus infections include:

In addition to prescription treatments there are also over-the-counter remedies available for use that do not need to be prescribed by a doctor. Common side effects can include minor irritation to the skin next to the affected nail as well as harmless discoloration (whitening) of the affected nail. For additional details on prescription and non prescription treatment options please visit www.nailfungus.ca.

What should I expect from treatment?

While most prescribed treatments are effective, curing a fungal infection takes time. A nail fungus infection will not clear until a new healthy nail, which is fungus free, replaces the damaged nail. As nails grow slowly, it can take 12 to 18 months for toenails to become clear, even when the medication is working.

Be patient and stick to the medication prescribed by your doctor. This will help you prevent a recurrence and lower the risk of transmitting the infection to others.

For more information visit nailfungus.ca

The information contained in this brochure is not a substitute for a call or visit to your physician. You are encouraged to consult with your physician if you suspect that you might have a toenail fungus infection.

This guide has been made available as a resource to enhance knowledge and information on toenail fungus infection.

Your Quick Guide to Toenail Fungus Infections has been endorsed by the Canadian Skin Patient Alliance