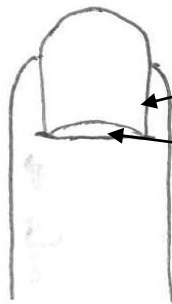


# Paronychia

**This leaflet offers information for parents whose child has an infection around the tip of their finger(s) or toe(s), known as a paronychia. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.**

## What is Paronychia?

A paronychia is an infection of the finger or toe where the nail and skin meet at the side or base of the finger or toenail.



A collection of pus develops around and under the nail usually because of a bacterial infection. It may be painful and the fingertip or toe can look red and feel hot when touched.

A paronychia can occur following an apparently minor trauma to the finger or toe, such as a splinter or thorn. It can also occur because of nail biting, finger sucking or biting / picking at the skin next to the nail.

## What treatments are available?

Your child may have already been started on antibiotics and will have an x-ray of the affected finger / toe to check the bone hasn't become infected. They may also need a short operation to remove the nail and wash out the infection from under the nail and surrounding skin of the finger or toe. This is normally carried out under general anaesthetic. The anaesthetist will speak with you and your child before the operation and answer any questions you may have.

Sometimes the operation can be carried out under local anaesthetic, so your child is awake. Your child would need to be happy with having one or two injections into the base of their injured finger or toe to make it numb and should be able to sit still during the operation. It is normally only children over 11 or 12 years of age who can do this.

If your child is younger but you think they would be happy, please discuss this with your doctor.

If there is any concern that the infection has spread into the bone, your child may need to be admitted to hospital for a prolonged course of intravenous and then oral antibiotics.

Surgery should mean the infection will be treated quicker and the associated pain reduced. It should also lessen the risk of the infection getting to the bone and nail deformity, although this is not guaranteed.

## **Are there any alternatives?**

The antibiotics may reduce the infection but without removing the nail and washing away the infection, it can easily recollect. If left untreated, there is a risk of nail deformity or an infection affecting the bone.

## **Asking for your consent**

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your child's care. For some treatments, you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree for your child to have the treatment and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said 'yes' previously. If you would like more details about our consent process, please ask for a copy of our policy.

## **What are the risks?**

All operations carry a small risk. This will be discussed with you by the surgeon and anaesthetist. Possible risks with this operation are:

- Pain after the procedure. To help prevent this, your child will have had local anaesthetic injected into the wound even if they had a general anaesthetic. This is to try to make the area as painless as possible when they wake up. Regular pain relief, paracetamol or ibuprofen, will also help over the first couple of days.
- Infection. The aims of the surgery are to wash out and remove the infection, but there is always a risk that it can recollect. Your child should complete the course of the antibiotics.
- Bleeding. It is quite common for there to be a small amount of bleeding after the operation. If the dressing becomes soaked with blood please seek medical advice or go to your nearest emergency department (ED or A&E).
- Abnormal nail growth. The nail may grow in pieces or may grow with ridges or marks on it. It takes between four and six months for a nail to grow and by the third nail growth cycle you would normally be able to see how the final nail will look. It is unusual to have no nail growth at all.
- Finger stiffness. This is a rare occurrence.

## **What happens during the operation?**

During the operation, the surgeon will usually remove the nail. They may also make a small cut into the skin adjacent to the nail to help release the pus from the fingertip or toe. The area will be thoroughly cleaned. The nail will not be replaced.

At the end of the operation a sterile dressing will be put on to protect the finger / toe. This may be a bit bulky especially on younger children who need extra protection.

## **Will there be any pain?**

Your child will have had local anaesthetic injected into the wound to try to make the area as painless as possible after the operation. This will normally last a few hours and it is important your child has some oral pain relief before the local anaesthetic wears off completely.

It is recommended that you give your child painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen at regular intervals for one to two days after the surgery. If you need any advice about this, please speak to your doctor or GP or call the medicines information patient helpline on 020 8725 1033.

You can also reduce pain and any swelling by keeping your child's hand elevated as much as possible. Your child won't be sent home with a sling though, as we want them to use their fingers and hand as much as possible.

## **What happens after the operation?**

Usually, your child will be able to go home later the same day when the nursing staff on the ward are happy they have fully recovered from the anaesthetic. If there is any concern that the infection is more severe or affecting the bone, your child will need to be admitted for observation of the wound and intravenous antibiotics.

## **What do I need to do after my child goes home?**

It is important that you encourage your child to rest for the first few days after their operation, to try to stop them knocking or banging the wound and causing bleeding and more pain.

It is very important that the dressing stays dry and as clean as possible until your child is reviewed in the paediatric dressing clinic. Wet dressings can delay healing and increase the risk of infection. Baths are best avoided although you can cover the dressing with a plastic bag to help protect it from splashing but don't let your child submerge it in water. If the dressing gets wet, please contact the ward from which s/he was discharged or go to the emergency department (ED or A&E) at St George's Hospital so it can be replaced.

If the ends of the bandage start to become loose stick them down with tape.

If the bandage is slipping off, don't pull it back up, as this may cause friction to the wound. If the dressing comes off, please contact the ward from which your child was discharged or go to the emergency department (ED or A&E) at St George's Hospital so that a new one can be applied.

While the dressing is in place, don't let your child do any activities involving sand and grit or where the wound could get knocked or banged.

It is important to look out for any signs of infection in the wound, which can be hard while the dressing is on. If your child develops any of the following symptoms, please seek medical advice immediately:

- an increase in pain
- feeling unwell in themselves
- an offensive smell or redness under the dressing.

## Will there be a follow-up appointment?

You will be given an appointment for your child to have their dressing removed and their wound looked at by a nurse one week after surgery. This will be in the Dragon Centre at the paediatric plastic surgery dressing clinic.

The nurse will see if the wound has healed enough for your child no longer to need a dressing and to be able to get the area wet. If the wound is not fully healed, your child will have a smaller dressing applied and you will be told when you should remove it or if you need to come back to the dressing clinic one more time.

Your child's finger or toe may still look swollen and have some dried blood around the end after the dressing is removed. The nail bed and fingertip or toe may also look a bit lumpy. This is normal and is nothing to worry about.

When the fingertip or toe is fully healed your child can get back to all normal activities, including bathing and swimming. Sometimes children get upset and don't want to look at their injury. If this happens, you can cover the area with a plaster for up to five days after the dressing has been removed, during the daytime only.

You may be offered an appointment to be seen by the doctors in the outpatient clinic about three months after the surgery to check the nail growth and how the scars have healed.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's finger, wound or dressing, please contact the ward from which your child was discharged.

Nicholls ward on 020 8725 3389 or 020 8725 2098

Freddie Hewitt ward on 020 8725 2074

Pinckney ward on 020 8725 2082

Jungle ward on 020 8725 2034. (7.30am to 8pm)

You can also contact the paediatric plastic surgery clinical nurse specialist on 020 8725 2656 and leave a message on the answering machine. If your query or concern is urgent please don't leave a message but contact the ward from which your child was discharged, numbers above.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

### AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)).

The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



**Reference:** PLS\_PAR\_03 **Published:** February 2024 **Review date:** February 2026