

WHAT YOUR NAILS SAY ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

Nail color and texture can reflect a wide range of medical conditions

Take a good look at your fingernails and you may notice subtle variations in the texture or color – a touch of white here, a rosy tinge there, perhaps some rippling or bumps in the surface. The imperfections may not look like much to you; however, to the trained eye they can provide valuable clues about your overall health.

A patient had his lungs checked after his dermatologist noticed a bluish tint in his nails, a sign that he wasn't getting enough oxygen. Sure enough, he had fluid in his lungs.

The nails offer many little clues to what's going on inside you. Warning signs for other conditions from hepatitis to heart disease may also appear in the nails. A change in the nails can be a sign of a local disease, like a fungus infection, or a sign of a systemic disease like lupus or anemia.

- Pale, whitish nail beds may indicate a low red blood cell count consistent with anemia. An iron deficiency can cause the nail to be thin and concave and have raised ridges.
- Lupus patients get quirky, angular blood vessels in their nail folds.
- Psoriasis starts in the nails up to 10% of the time and causes splitting and pitting of the nail bed.
- Heart disease can turn the nail beds red.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder can show up in the nails through persistent nail-biting or picking.
- Even common disorders like thyroid disease can cause abnormalities in the nail beds, producing dry, brittle nails that crack and split easily.

Joshua Fox, MD, Director of Advanced Dermatology and a spokesman for the American Academy of Dermatology gives the following 10 examples of nail changes that could indicate a serious medical condition:

NAIL APPEARANCE	ASSOCIATED CONDITION
White nails	Liver diseases, such as hepatitis
Yellowish, thickened, slow-growing nails	Lungs diseases, such as emphysema
Yellowish nails with a slight blush at the base	Diabetes
Half-white, half-pink nails	Kidney disease
Red nail beds	Heart disease
Pale or white nails beds	Anemia
Pitting or rippling of the nail surface	Psoriasis or inflammatory arthritis
Irregular red lines at the base of the nail fold	Lupus or connective tissue disease
Dark lines beneath the nail	Melanoma

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