FACT SHEET

Ingrown toenails in kids

If your child is complaining of a sore toe or toenail, this may be a condition called Onychocrytosis or an ingrown toenail. Usually they will complain of pain on one side of the toe nail, most commonly presenting in the big toes.

Your child will usually complain of moderate pain in the affected toe that is worse with pressure from enclosed shoes. If untreated the skin around the affected toenail can become infected making it very painful and difficult to walk and play sport.

Causes of ingrown toenails include improperly cut nails or picking of the nails, hyperhidrosis (sweaty feet), trauma (kicking sports), abnormally shaped nail plates (wide or curved), and pressure from socks or footwear. These contributing factors may cause a spike or sharp edge of the nail to pierce the skin, resulting in an ingrowing toenail.

Ingrown toenails are most common in teenage boys due to excessive sweat produced by their feet at this age, however they can occur at any age, even in infants.

If you suspect your child has an ingrown toenail, ensure you remove any offending pressure from footwear, and try soaking the foot in warm salty water. You may apply topical antiseptic solutions such as betadine to prevent infection. If the nail does not resolve, conservative treatment by your podiatrist may involve education on correct nail cutting, skilful removal of sharp nail edges/corners, application of topical antiseptics and dressings, bracing to correct nail shape, footwear shape and fitting advice, reducing excessive foot sweating and referral for antibiotic therapy if infection is present. If this is unsuccessful toenail surgery may be required, with permanent removal of the offending nail edge.