

7 Things Your Nails Say About Your Health

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No, your nails aren't just a canvas for pretty polish. Find out what serious problems might be hiding under your mani-pedi.

1. Weak, Brittle, or Splitting

The clue: If you can break or bend your nails easily, you can peel them, or they constantly split.

What it means: Brittle nails often related to advancing age. Less seriously, your nails could be overprocessed due to harsh manicures, acrylic nails, or gel wraps. "Take a break! Give your nails time to breathe," suggests **Rebecca Baxt, board-certified dermatologist in New York and New Jersey.**

What to do about it: Lay off the salon for a few weeks, and if you're a frequent washer, be sure to replenish the moisture in your hands with a rich nail conditioner. You may also be deficient in vitamin A, which helps your body process protein, a key ingredient in your nails, vitamin C, or biotin, which is a B vitamin that can help strengthen nails and speed their growth.

2. Yellow Nails

The clue: As the name suggests, your nails will have a subtle or dramatic yellow tinge.

What it means: It could be a number of things, from nail fungus, to psoriasis, to stains from smoking. On a lighter note, your affection for dark nail polish could also be to blame.

What to do about it: If your nails are stained, simply soak them in denture cleaner to remove the stain. If the yellowing persists, gets worse, or is accompanied by pain, it could be a fungal infection. You wouldn't be alone—roughly 50% of all nail discoloration is caused by fungus—but it still carries a gross factor to make you avoid sandals forever. Unfortunately, fungal infections can be tricky to conquer, especially if it's been ignored. Yellowing is also seen in psoriasis patients, as a side effect of certain medications, and a result of a rare condition called yellow nails syndrome. If you notice a change in your nails, see your doctor.

3. White Dots

The clue: Small white dots that *appear* to be on the surface. But when you try to buff them away—they won't!

What it means: White dots on the nails are usually due to some type of trauma—even something as simple as a banged finger or a too-aggressive cuticle trim from your manicurist.

What to do about it: Give them some time to grow out and fade. "But if they aren't going away, see your dermatologist," says Dr. Baxt. "It could be a fungal infection."

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5. Scooped-Out Nails

The clue: Nails that look scooped out. An easy test: squeeze one or two drops of water from an eye dropper on the center of your nail. If the water sits on top rather than accumulating, it's spoon nails.

What it means: "Spoon nails signify a deficiency in iron," says Kyle Coleman, MD of Westlake Dermatology and Cosmetic Surgery. When you have spoon nails, the blood supply doesn't reach the middle of your nail to make it grow. In some cases, spoon nails can be a sign of heart disease or hypothyroidism, a condition marked by an underactive thyroid gland.

What to do about it: You need to see your doctor and get the appropriate blood work done to figure out what kind of deficiency is behind it. In some cases, iron supplements might be prescribed. If your thyroid is out of wack, your endocrinologist will work with you to get it sorted out.

6. Horizontal Depressions

The clue: Deep depressions that run across the nail bed.

What it means: Slammed your finger in a car door? If you've had a similar recent trauma to your nail, that's the easy answer. But if you've managed to keep your digits clear of injury, these depressions—called Beau's lines—could be a sign of something more serious: most commonly uncontrolled diabetes, circulatory diseases, and any illness associated with a high fever (like pneumonia or mumps).

What to do about it: This could mean something serious. If you haven't experienced any nail trauma but have Beau's lines, see your doctor soon than later.