

## Your nails change as you age — here’s how to care for them, according to dermatologists

Plus expert-approved products to keep your nails strong and shiny over time.

**Kara Birnbaum / TODAY**

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**By Kaleigh Fasanella and [Amanda Fama](#)**

Just like [skin](#) and [hair](#), your nails age with you — the good news is there are many things you can do to help make it a graceful process. Why do our digits actually age, though? According to experts, keratin loss plays a large role, along with a variety of other internal and external factors like malnutrition, slower circulation and excessive water exposure.

Thankfully, there are tons of products available to help strengthen and protect your nails as you age. We reached out to board-certified dermatologists to learn about the best ones.

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### [Why do nails change with age?](#)

“Our nails age just like the rest of our body,” explains board-certified dermatologist [Dr. Pooja Rambhia](#). “Age-associated nail changes are largely due to impaired circulation, trauma, [infections and underlying systemic medical conditions](#).”

[Dr. Dana Stern](#), a board-certified dermatologist who specializes in nail care, embellishes on blood flow and says that as we age, “[our peripheral circulation becomes compromised](#).” She continues, “The reason why that’s significant is people don’t realize that healthy nails require oxygen and nutrients that are delivered from the bloodstream. And so, when circulation is compromised, it significantly can negatively impact nail health.”

Another culprit? Keratin loss. “Our nails, like hair, are [largely composed of keratin proteins](#), and as we age, this naturally declines,” says Rambhia.

The speed of nail growth also changes with time, which can affect nail health significantly. Stern, who notices a prominent change in growth speed around the

age of 40, says that a "slower-growing nail is replaced less frequently, and is therefore exposed to more environmental factors."

When does that shift start? [Dr. Michele Green](#), a board-certified dermatologist, tells us that "changes in our nails can begin as early as our twenties, as nail growth begins to decline starting at 25 years old."

More specifically, they grow "at a slower rate, with a [declining rate of roughly 0.5% per year](#)."

### **What happens to nails as a result of aging?**

"Our nails can commonly become brittle, discolored and prone to breakage," says Rambhia.

They can also become ridged. In fact, Stern says ridging (aka [onychorrhexis](#)) is "an age-related phenomenon" that occurs when the growth plate of the nail shrivels. She compares nail ridging to skin wrinkles that form over time.

Stern continues, "Another age-related issue that I see very frequently in my practice is something called [onycholysis](#), which is when the nail lifts or separates off the nail bed." She tells us, "I have personally observed that it seems like once we hit the age of around 50, our nails just don't adhere as firmly as they used to."

### **How to care for aging nails**

Caring for our nails as we age is no different than tending to our skin and hair — it's all about taking an intentional inside-outside approach focused on both nutrition and topical daily care. It's also important to remember that consistency is key.

"The best way to minimize age-associated nail changes is to consume a well-balanced diet that contains adequate amounts of protein, essential vitamins and minerals, including iron," says Rambhia in regards to nutrition.

All of our experts agree that moisturizing is also extremely important when it comes to nail health. "Frequent [moisturizing of the nails](#) and its surrounding skin, in conjunction with drinking enough water, can also help maintain hydration and help prevent the formation of brittle nails," Rambhia continues.

However, *exposing* your nails to water isn't always a good thing. Stern says water can put a "tremendous strain" on nail cells, as nails are extremely absorbent. Green

also notes the downfalls of water exposure, saying "hands that are frequently wet or submerged in water can result in weak and brittle nails."

Stern suggests utilizing gloves in the instance of water exposure: "And so, if you're doing a lot of house work [and] wet work, [gloves](#) are important."

**Clear nail polish can also help protect brittle nails over time. [Dr. Rebecca Baxt](#), a board-certified dermatologist, says, "I do tell people to put a clear coat of nail polish on them [weak nails] to try and give them a little bit more strength."** Green also suggests polish and tells us, "Base coats and top coats are excellent for fortifying and strengthening nails after a [manicure](#) or pedicure."

### **[Best moisturizers for aging nails, according to dermatologists](#)**

[Dr. Marisa Garshick](#), a board-certified dermatologist based in New York City and New Jersey, highly recommends classic petroleum-based Vaseline ointment for giving nails some extra TLC. "By providing an occlusive barrier, this healing ointment helps to reduce external irritants," she explains. "It can be applied throughout the day as needed to improve the overall look and feel of the nails."

Green suggests using this hands-and-nail cream by Bioderma, calling out the addition of moisturizing [shea butter](#) within the formula. She also tells us, "The cream creates a hydrogel barrier to protect and nourish both the nails and skin, even after repeated washing." This pick contains [glycerin](#), which is an active ingredient that plays a big role in hydrating skin.

**Baxt recommends Aquaphor as a suitable moisturizer for nail care. The ointment, which contains lanolin (a [highly moisturizing ingredient](#) derived from the wool of sheep), is clinically proven to create a barrier above the skin to help heal dry or cracked areas.**

One [Amazon reviewer](#) who uses Aquaphor on their nails wrote, "The last thing I do every night is rub a little Aquaphor ointment into my fingernails and hands. My nails used to be weak and splitting, but after I began using Aquaphor, my nails became as strong as acrylics. (Not overnight, of course.)"

"This is a great, fragrance-free thick moisturizing cream that absorbs quickly into the skin on the hands, cuticles, and nail plate to hydrate and protect from environmental irritants," says Rambhia of the French skin care brand's bestselling barrier treatment. In addition to pro-vitamin B5 (aka panthenol), the formula also contains hydrating glycerin and dimethicone, soothing shea butter and nourishing centella asiatica.

**This tried-and-true, lanolin-free ointment has been tested by dermatologists, and Baxt personally uses it on herself "all the time." The gentle formula is scent-free and non-comedogenic, and it's designed to help moisturize dry (and extra-dry!) skin.**

**Baxt also recommends this nail conditioner, which is "not that expensive" and "very effective." She goes on to say she advises her patients to put this on "once in the morning and once at night."**

**The thick formula, which aims to help strengthen nails and cuticles, is rich in lanolin. Baxt suggests patients turn to Vaseline if they're allergic to the ingredient.**

“Containing [vitamin E](#), this nail strengthener can be used for weak or thin nails and is a great option for someone looking for a vegan and 17-free formulation,” says Garshick. “It is meant to be used in a four-week treatment cycle and then can be used as needed.”

“This [nail strengthener](#) helps to make nails appear visibly brighter and healthier,” says Garshick of Essie’s top-rated nail treatment. “It strengthens soft or damaged nails while improving overall nail health using MSM technology and can be applied to clean, bare nails.”

Another pick from Garshick, this brush-on hardener helps to reduce flaking, peeling and splitting nails while also strengthening the nail and helping to moisturize the nails. It contains what the brand calls “crystal resin tears,” which is a gum extracted from the pistachio mastic tree that aids in the natural keratinization process of nails.

Kale has plenty of [dietary benefits](#), but did you ever think about incorporating it into your nail care routine? Green recommends this base coat that's actually fortified with kale extract to help strengthen nails. She continues that the polish is "enriched with vitamins and superfood extracts to provide the building blocks for keratin production, strengthen nails and stimulate nail growth."

Another recommendation from Rambhia, this travel-friendly nail strengthener is a great option for when you’re on-the-go as it’s super easy to apply and fit in your pocket or purse.

“It hydrates, strengthens, and promotes growth of the nail plate,” says Rambhia. This is thanks to a powerhouse blend of hyaluronic acid and mastic oil, which work together to keep nails strong and resilient.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Are manicures bad for your nails?  
Is there a way to avoid aging nails?  
Should I be concerned about nail changes?  
Is acetone nail polish remover bad?

## How we chose

We selected expert-recommended nail care products made with specific ingredients that aid in strengthening and repairing aging nails. All of the products are designed to leave nails hydrated, nourished and more resilient to breakage as well as other age-related issues.

## Meet the experts

- **Dr. Pooja Rambhia** is a New York-based board-certified dermatologist. She's also an American Society for Dermatology Surgery fellow at [UnionDerm](#).
- **Dr. Dana Stern** is a board-certified dermatologist who focuses on nail health and nail surgery. She also developed and sells [numerous products for nail renewal and upkeep](#).
- **Dr. Michele Green** is a board-certified dermatologist based in the Upper West Side of New York City. Her practice offers a variety of treatments ranging from acne treatments to chemical peels and more.
- **Dr. Rebecca Baxt** is a board-certified dermatologist in Paramus, New Jersey at [Baxt CosMedical](#). She has received [numerous awards, including the "Top Doctor" of 2023 in Bergen County](#).
- **Dr. Marisa Garshick** is a board-certified dermatologist in New York, New York at [MDCS Dermatology](#).

SOURCE: <https://www.today.com/shop/anti-aging-nail-products-rcna135655>