

CLUW News Health Tip

HEALTHY HANDS & NAILS

Nail cosmetics is a multi-million dollar industry. Most nail cosmetics are considered safe. However, there are many problems associated with them. Allergic reactions are common. Symptoms are itching, burning and tenderness in the nail bed (the skin beneath the nail), the cuticle area, and sometimes in the face and neck. Methacrylate (MMA) has been banned although some discount salons may use it due to its low cost. Other allergens include formaldehyde compounds in nail lacquers and hardeners. Never apply an artificial nail if your natural nail or skin is irritated. Have one nail done first. Wait a few days to see if a reaction develops before doing the rest.

Nail polish removers are the most common cause of irritant reactions. Symptoms include dry, peeling nails, loss of the cuticle, and brittle nails that chip and break. Dermatologists recommend that nail polish remover not be used more than twice a month. Polish removers with acetone are especially drying. If your nails are brittle, apply a moisturizer each time you wash your hands. Rub the moisturizer into your nails and cuticles as well as your hands.

Trauma can occur when sharp instruments are used during a manicure. Electric drills used to remove acrylic nails may go through a nail and even injure the underlying nail bed. When artificial nails are applied, the nail is often abraded to improve bonding of the acrylic. When the acrylic is removed, the surface layers of the nail are subject to further injury. The FDA says that artificial nails should never be worn more than three months at a time. Also, cuticles may be pushed back gently but should not be cut. The cuticle protects the nail and when it is removed there is a space where bacteria and fungus can enter.

Infections can develop if manicure tools and instruments have not been properly sterilized. Even a minor cut alongside the nail or cuticle allows bacteria and fungi to enter. Fungal infections account for almost half of all nail disorders. Fungal growth occurs frequently under artificial nails as a result of moisture becoming trapped between the natural and artificial nails. Symptoms are usually a white or yellow spot under the tip of the fingernail or toenail. As the fungus spreads, the nail may discolor, thicken and crumble at the edge. Fungal infections are often difficult to treat although medications are available from your doctor.

Well-groomed hands and nails are important to one's appearance. However, long fingernails, rings, and various nail treatments often harbor bacteria. Outbreaks of infections have been traced to artificial fingernails of health care workers. Short, natural fingernails are recommended for nurses and other health care workers who provide care to patients.