

DID YOU KNOW: No instant cures

The Internet is filled with instant fixes for toenail fungus, including a white vinegar soak, bleach, mouthwash, tea tree oil and Vicks VapoRub. Podiatrist Dr. Andrew Klayman says there's no scientific evidence to support them as cures.



Not so happy feet

There's nothing fun about nail fungus which plagues millions, but new laser treatments offer hope



laser light works by passing through the nail where it is absorbed by the pigment in the fungi. The ensuing heat kills or damages the fungal organism.

About two or three treatments are usually needed for the procedure, which is painless — there is no downtime

and no side effects. But unlike the oral or topical drugs, which are covered by most provincial health plans, laser treatment is not. The cost, \$200 to \$300 for two to three treatments per foot, is pricey if it's not partially covered by your private health plan.

ON YOUR TOES

Dr. Andrew Klayman says you can prevent nail fungus by:

- Catching and treating athlete's foot early and effectively.
- Taking care around public changing rooms and swimming pools: Wear flip-flops, dry your feet well.
- Let your feet breathe. Air out shoes and don't wear the same shoes on consecutive days.
- Only attend nail salons that have adequate levels of hygiene. Make sure all instruments and files are sterilized and foot baths have removable liners.
- Keep toenails trimmed and clean, and don't share your scissors and files.

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Dr. Harvey Miltchin, director of Toronto's Accent on Feet clinic

ened and separated from the nail bed.

"Patients who suffer from fungal nails are often too embarrassed to wear open-toed shoes or show their feet," Miltchin says.

When earlier this year Health Canada approved a laser for use on fungal nails, warts and scars, Miltchin and Klayman embraced the idea. Up until now, toenail fungus has been treated with prescription medications. Getting rid of it can take weeks, months, even years.

Some of the oral antifungal medication prescribed can eliminate the infection and

restore a nail to health when taken for six to 12 weeks. But side effects may include rashes and a risk of liver damage, and weekly blood tests are sometimes required to monitor the effects.

Surgery, though the most invasive of treatments, has also been a treatment option.

Miltchin says treatment options before the laser have been limited "because they didn't work very well and patients were concerned about side effects. I stopped prescribing oral medications years ago because the risks outweighed the benefits."

Called GenesisPlus, its

There's a fungus among us and it's not very pretty.

Called onychomycosis, nail fungus is estimated to affect up to 10% of the population worldwide.

"It's everywhere in our environment," says Toronto podiatrist Dr. Andrew Klayman. "Exposure to the gym, unsterile pedicure instruments at nail salons, swimming pools and public showers can spread the fungus. And it's contagious."

Klayman, who runs Klayman Foot Laser Clinics (klaymanfootlaserclinics.com), is one of a growing number of Canadian podiatrists who has found laser treatment to be effective against the stubborn infection.

Athlete's foot can be easily treated with over-the-counter sprays and powders. But toenail fungus, if left alone,



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is much more persistent and can destroy the nail bed; in some people it can lead to serious secondary bacterial complications such as cellulitis.

Dr. Harvey Miltchin, director of Toronto's Accent on Feet clinic (accentonfeet.com), says treating fungal nails has been one of the most frustrating challenges during his 30 years as a podiatrist. Fungus causes toenails to become discoloured, thick-