

PARONYCHIA (CHRONIC)

Chronic paronychia refers to a skin condition, which occurs around the nails. The term chronic means that the condition can come and go over time. The word paronychia is a fancy medical term referring to the inflammation, redness and swelling that can occur around the nails.

Chronic paronychia occurs most commonly in people whose hands are in a wet environment, for example nurses, bartenders, dishwashers and hairdressers. Repeated cuts and minor trauma of the skin can damage the area around the nail and in the cuticle. This minor damage allows further irritation. There can be overgrowth of various surface germs, which slow the healing process.

Symptoms of chronic paronychia include loss of the cuticle, tenderness, redness and swelling. Often the nails can appear changed with rough surfaces or grooves.

Sometimes the area around the nail can be colonized with a normal bacteria or yeast on the skin. Because of this, one of the treatments that is often used is a medication, which has antibiotic properties against these types of organisms. In many cases, it is not an actual infection, but simply colonization on the surface of the skin, which impedes the healing.

Treatment of chronic paronychia starts by avoiding any chronic irritation or wet environments. Wearing cotton-lined gloves to wash dishes can be helpful if this is an exposure. In most cases, topical medications are used. These often involve two different creams or two different liquids. One of the products has anti-inflammatory properties, which tends to eliminate the redness, swelling and symptoms.

Because chronic paronychia can be a problem, which tends to come and go, it is helpful to use sensitive skin care to minimize small breaks in the skin. This includes using milder soaps and moisturizers. The two different topical medications should be used on the affected areas until the problem improves. In general, the frequency of use can be decreased as the condition improves. It may take many months, however, for any nail changes to reverse since the nails grow so slow.

If you have any other questions regarding chronic paronychia, please ask me before you leave the office.