



Nailbiting Help File

Nailbiting or Beautifully Groomed Nails?

For some people having bitten nails is just something to live with, even when they dislike the way that their hands and fingers look. But if we can understand why the nail biting began then perhaps we can find ways to make it stop.

In children, nail-biting is a nervous habit that's often a symptom of anxiety or insecurity. This nervous habit is sometimes continued into adulthood particularly in times of tension or difficulty.

Why did it start?

If a toddler is biting his nails, you may worry that he's anxious about something. After all, many people describe nail biting as a "nervous habit." But anxiety is only one explanation for why children nibble at their nails. Your toddler may be doing it for a number of other less worrying reasons; out of curiosity or boredom, to relieve stress, to pass the time, or simply from force of habit.

Of all the nervous habits; which include thumb sucking, hair twisting, and nose picking, nail biting is the most common (almost all kids do it at some point) and is the most likely to continue into adulthood. About a third of junior school pupils and half of adolescents bite their nails, at least for a little while. However in most situations the child will stop the habit on his own, either because he loses interest or because his friends and classmates tease him about it.

Nail biting (or Onychophagia) as an adult

Some adults carry on with nail biting as a nervous habit, in fact for some nail-biting is so well-established that they barely realize they are doing it. So what's the problem? Nail-biting looks bad to others and in this germ-conscious society, few people want to shake hands with a guy or girl who's just put their fingers in their mouth.

Why do you do it?

If you want to stop biting, it helps to figure out why you do it in the first place. Common reasons include:

Old habit.

Many people can trace their nail-biting back to their shy and self-conscious teenage years. Now the process has become second nature and they do it without thinking.

Stress.

Stress or tension is one of the leading reasons people begin and continue to bite their nails. Biting and picking become automatic reaction to the stress of a challenging job or a worrying problem. Nervousness. It is not uncommon for a person to resort to nail biting when they are feeling nervous before that big meeting or on the way to that hot date. It can have the same psychologically soothing effect as smoking or overeating. (Until they look down and see their nails!)

Post-smoking habit.

Those who give up smoking sometimes replace that habit with nail biting, it's something to do with the hands that would have been occupied by a cigarette.

Habit triggered by another activity.

Often nail biting will be associated with an activity such as talking on the phone or watching TV. Some people bite their nails when bored or unoccupied, e.g. sitting on the train or in the doctor's office.

Break the habit

By isolating when, and why, you are biting your nails and then briefly monitoring yourself under the same conditions; you will be able to stop your hands from automatically going to your mouth at certain times. If will power isn't enough, consider some of the following remedies and aids:

Put a formula on your nails.

There are several foul-tasting formulas on the market aimed at making your nails taste awful enough to turn you off of biting them, or at least alert you to when you do it unconsciously. Check for suitable products at your local chemist.

Keep your hands busy.

Idle hands will only serve to fuel your habit, so keep them busy. If you've found that you bite your nails when you are on the telephone, keep a pad of paper by the phone and doodle with a pen instead. If you bite your nails when you're tense, consider adding a "stress ball" that you squeeze to your collection of desk toys and play with that instead. Chew gum or mints. If you are already chewing something else, you'll be less likely to chew your nails (nail bits and chewing gum...that's a bad combination).

Keep gum or mints with you at all times, and when you find your hands going to your mouth, pop in a stick of gum or a mint instead. Use nail clippers and emery boards. Nail biters are always tempted to bite off a sharp edge on a nail or a nail that is a little longer than the others. Keep nail clippers with you and use those instead. Put an emery board in every room of your home and keep one at your place of work too. Better to file down your nail a little than bite off chunks!

Keep it away!

Once you break the habit initially, you need to reinforce your good work to stop the problem from re-occurring.

Address the cause.

Once you discover what triggers your nail biting, make a point of addressing that cause. If stress in your life is the culprit, then work on reducing the stress with relaxation techniques, exercise, more sleep, a smaller work load, etc. If nervousness generally drives you to bite your nails, make a point of learning other ways to deal with nerves. Make use of breathing exercises to reduce tension.

Form new habits.

The best way to prevent a bad habit from reoccurring is to replace it with a good habit. Get into the habit of using nail clippers before your nails grow to a length that tempts you to bite. Develop the habit of linking your hands together when they are idle instead of bringing them up to your mouth. Make nail care a priority.

Now that you have stopped biting your nails, learn to take care of them. By taking pride in the look of your hands, you'll be less likely to "fall off the wagon" and return to nail biting. When time is short, or you are still struggling, Hypnotherapy can provide an effective and rapid way of dealing with the problem. Any underlying subconscious issues can be resolved and new methods of dealing with the triggering problems can be learnt. Look out for our nail biting MP3s coming soon to the Gift4Life web site, one for women and one for men.

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