Onychomycosis is the medical term for fingernail or toenail fungus. If you have onychomycosis, here are some ways to deal with it:

- Some people file their own nails or visit a podiatrist to have their nails filed.
- When there is only a small amount of fungus, sometimes clipping the affected area and applying antifungal medicine to the nail and the clipped edge will get rid of the fungus.
- The most effective treatment for onychomycosis is to take an oral medicine (pill) every day for 6 to 12 weeks. This medicine prevents fungus growth as the nail grows. The affected part of the old nail grows out on its own and then can be clipped off.
- Many people choose not to treat onychomycosis.

Deciding Whether to Treat with Oral Medicine

When deciding whether or not to treat your onychomycosis, you may want to ask yourself these questions:

- How much does the fungus bother you?
- Do you have diabetes or recurring infections in your legs? If you do, your health care provider may advise you to treat your onychomycosis.
- Do you have other health conditions that this oral medicine could make worse? Two of these are liver disease and some types of lupus.

Treatment Costs

If you decide to treat your onychomycosis, you will need to pay for medicines and lab tests. The tests you will need to check the health of your liver will cost about $200. The medicine will cost $75 to $150. You will also have the added cost of doctor visits. Usually, health insurance will cover most of these costs.
Side Effects of the Medicine

Most people tolerate the oral antifungal medicine well. But, here are some side effects to watch for:

- **Hepatitis** (liver disease). Symptoms of hepatitis are:
  - Severe fatigue
  - Ongoing nausea or vomiting
  - Abdominal (belly) pain
  - Yellow skin or eyes (*jaundice*)
  - Dark urine or light-colored stool

- Low white blood cell count. Symptoms of low white blood cell count are ongoing:
  - Fever over 100.5°F
  - Infection
  - Sore throat

- Rash

If you have any of the above signs or symptoms, stop taking the drug and call your doctor.

What to Expect if You Take the Oral Medicine

Before you fill your prescription for this medicine, you will need to get a blood test to make sure your liver is working normally and your white blood cells are at a normal level. Do not fill your prescription until your health care provider confirms that these tests are normal.

You will repeat these blood tests 4 to 6 weeks after you start taking the drug, before you fill your prescription for the rest of your treatment.

The success rate for curing onychomycosis with this medicine is fairly good, about 50% (50 out of 100 people) or higher. You will not have a normal nail until an entirely new nail has grown out, from the cuticle to the tip. For toenails, this period is 1½ to 2 years. For fingernails, the growth period is about 6 months.

Because the most common form of onychomycosis usually starts with athlete’s foot, we may ask you to use a topical antifungal cream at the clipped edge of your nail, between your 4th and 5th toes, and anywhere else athlete’s foot is present. You will need to do this for the rest of your life to keep the fungus from coming back. Without doing this, the risk of reinfection of the nail is about 50% (50 out of 100 people). No study has been done to confirm that using a topical antifungal cream prevents reinfection, but it makes good sense to do so.