Chapter 10

Specific Nail Conditions and Formulas

This section explores some of the most popular problems facing the average client. Holistic explanations are provided on the reasons for the conditions and what can be done to improve them.

Brittle Nails and Cuticles

Brittle cuticles tear easily and the clients with these usually complain of constant "hangnails." Hangnails (agnails) are thin slivers of skin hanging around the nails. Many people can't resist the temptation to pull, or even bite, these pieces of skin off. The areas around the back of the nail beds usually look raw and unsightly. Minor infections are also more likely to occur if the client tears these skin tags off themselves.

The manicurist should ask the client if they have received manicures in the recent past during which the cuticles were clipped off. This clipping technique for cuticle removal promotes hangnails, too. Read the information in the standard manicuring section (page 136), for the proper method to care for cuticles. After cuticle remover is used, aromatherapy oil can be massaged into the area.

If the client complains that they have always had problems with cracking and tearing of the cuticle area, ask questions to determine if any of the following are factors: diet, level of water intake, heredity and/or life-style choices such as exposing their hands to harsh chemicals.

If their diet is the main reason, the aromatherapy formulas will offer nutrients to the skin for balance. You can create a special aromatherapy solution, that the client can purchase for homecare use at night.

Brittle nails can be caused by internal, systemic conditions. Most often it stems from part of the client's family genetic coding. Although drinking sufficient amounts of water would be helpful, it is not the only solution. Brittle nails are usually thin and fragile. Brittle

nails are usually accompanied by brittle cuticles, but not necessarily vice versa. They will split, crack, and break without too much force being put upon the nails. Aromatherapy can have a positive impact on these nails.

There are several factors to consider when determining if a positive change in the condition is realistic:

- The severity of the condition.
- How long the condition has gone on untreated.
- How dedicated the client is to protecting the nails from outside conditions, i.e. harsh chemicals, long hours at a keyboard or typewriter, heavy manual labor.

This condition often results in the manicurist offering to put arcylic nails or silk wraps over the brittle nails. The idea is by covering it over you will not have to deal with the condition. However, brittle nails are not truly strong enough to be good candidates for artificial nails or the strong adhesive used in silk wraps. The decision to put acrylic nails or silk wraps over these nails should be put off until after 90 days of dedicated effort working on improving them is completed. If, at the end of the 90 days, a significant improvement is not offered, then applying the acrylic nails or silk wraps seems an appropriate choice.

Brittle nails sometimes have ridges over the nail bed. If so, ask if the client has recently had artificial nails removed. The ridges may be a sign of uneven drill work. If they have, in fact, had that done within the last six months, recommend that they make weekly appointments with you to treat the nails and cuticles to return the nails to a smooth texture. This will take at least three months of continual care to reduce the damage the drilling created. It may be very difficult to have the client understand and appreciate all the time and effort it will take to undo the damage. So often clients want a "quick fix" and the truth is, none exists.

Part of the solution to aiding a client with a hereditary disposition to brittle nails, is to suggest they eat a well-balanced diet, with plenty of vitamins. Calcium is a mineral that is a very important factor in growing strong nails. Some believe eating gelatin for its keratin will help. It will not hurt anything, but the increase in keratin is so very minor, that it's help to brittle nails is not noticeable.

Another part of the treatment of brittle nails is the increase in oxygen to the base of the nail bed. The edge of the nail is the only part that is completely dead. The nail directly under the cuticle area is where most of the improvement will take place, since this is the

area that is still very much alive and thriving. The lunula, commonly referred to as the "half-moon" is also very much alive. The keratin fibers of the nail are nourished in these two areas. Any signs of damage will first be seen in and around the lunula.

The keratin fibers of the nail are 50 times more tightly woven than those found in the skin. As in all hereditary factors, we get what we have been born with in the thickness of the keratin weave. No one can change the biological thickness of the skin to be more than when we were born. The same is not true with the keratin fibers of the nails.

Following certain lifestyle choices, including the diet we keep, a change in the thickness of the nails can be brought about, but only within a set range. The nails can only change by a percentage of the basics given at birth. Ask the client if their parents both had brittle nails. This will give you an idea of the gene-pool from which the client's nails are based.

NOTE

Pre-natal vitamins were not used as extensively as they are now. If your client is over 40, they may not have had the added nutrients that pregnant mothers get today. Should your client be one of a multiple birth, such as twins, their nails may be calcium deficient from birth, too. Client's history does have an impact on their future nails.

Lifestyle choices, like not eating vegetables other than potatoes, will have a negative effect on brittle nails. The amount of caffeine ingested will also impede the improvement of brittle nails. This includes coffee, tea, and sodas. Cigarette smoking also makes nails more brittle, since tar and nicotine end up in the keratin fibers of our hair, skin, and nails. No amount of aromatherapy can undo the damage of a smoker. Realize what you are up against, before making any claims for improvement!

Whether the condition is serious or mild, aromatherapy formulas provide at least temporary assistance to the appearance of frail, brittle nails. After treatment, they will look smooth and shiny, with a marked increase in natural coloring under the nails. The aromatherapy formulas offer an increase in blood flow to the fingertips and under the nails. In some formulas there will be a warming sensation deeper than that coming from the heated oil. Vasodilation causes an inner heat the client will sense very quickly. This is normal. For sensitive clients, it is best to let them know in advance that the "inner warming" is ok.

CAUTION

Special care must be practiced when using specific oils.

Remember: Rosemary, sage, eucalyptus, hyssop, fennel, and tagetes (among others) are **very dangerous** to pregnant women.

Eucalyptus and lemongrass **cannot** be used on young children.

Bergamot is **very dangerous** to any client with photosensitivity.

Aromatherapy Formulas for Brittle Nails and Cuticles

Formula #1: Warm 3 tbsp. of evening primrose oil and add: 3 drops eucalyptus. Stir, and gently dip a cotton swab into the oil. Distribute the oil around the cuticle beds on each finger. Then using circular motions, massage each cuticle bed with your thumb pad. Spend around one minute massaging each finger (allow approximately 10 minutes for this step). After working on both hands, go back to the first finger and GENTLY PUSH the cuticle skin under the bed, using a cotton-covered orangewood stick. After working all cuticle beds, massage the remaining oil into the entire nail beds of each finger. Redip the cotton swab, and coat UNDER each nail's free edge.

This formula will produce a very slight warming sensation as you work it into the cuticle skin and over the brittle nail beds. The increased circulation offers an improvement to the natural coloring of the nail bed. **CAUTION:** Not for pregnant women.

Formula #2: Warm 3 tbsp.avocado oil and add: 2 drops carrot, 6 drops peppermint, and 8 drops lemon oil. Stir. Follow the same application instructions as in Formula #1, above.

This formula will also produce a warming sensation. The lemon makes the coloring of the nail bed even clearer. This formula will be wonderful for a smoker with yellowy nail beds.

Formula #3: Warm 3 tbsp. grapeseed oil and add: 4 drops eucalyptus and 4 drops peppermint. Follow the application instructions found in Formula #1.

Since two vasodilaters are being introduced to the cuticles and nail beds, every strong inner heat sensation will be noticeable.

Formula #4: Warm 3 tbsp. jojoba oil and add: 10 drops lemon, 6 drops carrot, and 6 drops cypress. Stir. Follow the application instructions found in Formula #1.

This formula is mild in comparison to the others. There should not be any sensation from the application. For nails that are really thin and fragile, as well as brittle, this formulation will be easier to handle.

Rough, Coarse, Skin-damaged Hands

Although severely conditioned hands are the biggest challenge, the clients with these hands are also likely to become the most loyal customers, if you can turn their hands back to normal condition. You must get them to realize that lifestyle changes are probably needed. They have to change the way they wash their hands, the way they expose their hands to harsh chemicals. Also, the water temperature they use to shower or bathe in has to be reduced.

You can create a special formula that can be massaged into the hands to protect them from outside influences. These formulas will feel slippery and the clients will have to adjust their grips. One possible solution is to have clients wear gloves over their hands to protect the formula and provide better grip.

Intensive Aromatherapy Skin Protector Formulas

Formula #1: Use a double boiler or baby bottle warmer. Melt ½ stick cocoa butter, 4 tbsps. of beeswax (found in health food stores), and 1 oz. of apricot kernel. Slowly add: ½ tsp. borax, ½ cup distilled water, 8 drops lavender, 3 drops rosemary, and 2 drops thyme. Stir continuously. This solution will penetrate the skin on the hands if deeply massaged, but will also leave a film on the surface. Slow effleurage movements will work well. Remove the formula from the nails if intending to polish nails during service, as the formula will make polishing the nails impossible. To remove formula from nails, put alcohol on a cotton swab and work it over the nails. Put any leftover mixture in a sterile glass container with a tight lid, to store for future use.

This will be a favorite for many clients with hands that look as painful as they feel. The thyme will tingle but not very much.

Formula #2: Use a double boiler or baby bottle warmer. Melt 1 stick of cocoa butter, 1 heaping tablespoon of glycerine and 1 oz. of almond oil. Stir while you add: 10 drops patchouli. The mixture will

leave a film on the skin's surface. Use the same application instructions as mentioned in Formula #1 above.

This formulation will be effective and mild to the skin. For any sensitive clients, choose this one.

Essential Oils Specific to Treatment of Hands, Nails, and Feet

For the professional manicurist with more advanced training in aromatherapy, following are partial lists of the essential oils that have healing properties for the hands, nails and feet. As always, CHECK FOR ALLERGIES BEFORE CREATING ANY FORMULATIONS. For a single application, begin with one teaspoon of a base/carrier oil (the 17 base/carrier oils are listed on page 28) and add any one of the essential oils to it. The total number of drops should fall into the 6–10 drop range, except when fighting fungi; judge those differently. Fungi-fighting formulas are listed later in this chapter.

Essential oils with healing properties for the hands include: Carrot, eucalyptus lemon, geranium, lavender, lemon, lime, neroli, palmarosa, rose, rosemary, and sandalwood.

Essential oils with healing properties for the nails include: Carrot, eucalyptus peppermint, eucalyptus radiata, grapefruit, lavender, lemon, myrrh, patchouli, oregano, rosemary, sandalwood, tea tree, tagetes, and thyme.

Essential oils with healing properties for the feet include: Calendula, carrot, chamomile, fennel, lavender, lemon, palmarosa, tagetes and thyme.

Damaged Nail Beds

Unlike in the condition of brittle nails, for which there can be genetic reasons and/or lifestyle causes, damaged nails are caused by definite human error. As of late, the most common cause is the drilling for acrylic nail fillings during nail appointments. Other causes are doing housework, home repairs, or working on cars, where tools like hammers, screwdrivers, or staple guns are used. It is common for people to take their hands and nails for granted, and so damage occurs. The good news is that the body is reasonably forgiving, and has the ability to repair itself. There are, however, some repairs that are not so easily corrected.

The Black Nail

Black nail is caused by direct force to the nail. The nail bed gets bruised so badly that it dies and turns black. Most often the capillaries in the soft tissue under the traumatized nail break, then clot, and the clot turns to a black color. With time, the clot will be re-absorbed and disappear. Time is needed to regrow another nail. Instead of weeks, it will take several months for the nail to grow out. The new nail will replace the dead one. Sometimes the nail bed will disattach itself from the skin underneath. The person must tend to and "baby" the nail so that it does not fall off prematurely (before the new nail has grown out). There can be conditions that will make the nail fall off too early. If the soft tissue under the nail bed swells too much with a large blood clot, it will lift the nail bed. Then when the clot gets reabsorbed , it leaves a significant gap where the nail bed cannot reattach itself and subsequently falls off.

Once the nail is dead and the blood clot is gone, the person should get to a professional manicurist for help. The manicurist can show them how to gently and very carefully massage the cuticle tissue of the nail. The cuticle area is where the new, fresh nail will come. The massage improves the area's oxygen transfer. The better the oxygen transfer, the healthier the cuticles and thus the greater the chance the nail has to come out in perfect condition. Refer to the aromatherapy formulas for improvement of cuticles earlier in this chapter. These formulas will aid these damaged cuticles too.

Drill Bit Grooves

A client's nails may show ridges that are caused from the nail drill bit used to remove acrylic nails. Sometimes the natural nail is grazed by the nail drill used to remove the acrylic nails. It is very difficult for a manicurist to hold a drill so carefully that it only touches the acrylic nails and NOT the natural nail. Since the nails are being covered by the acrylic coating, there is a false sense of security that it does not make any difference what the natural nail look like. However, these ridges can make permanent scars that will remain over the nails, if repeated grazing is endured over time. The acrylic coatings can be soaked off and removed, the scars cannot. Sadly, aromatherapy cannot help the problem.

This text makes note of this condition because the professional manicurist has the option to use other methods to work the acrylic off of the nail bed, other than the drill, and it might be worth taking another look at these options. They include using a manual file or

rough-grained buffing block, or using nippers to pick off the lifting parts of the acrylic nail.

Split/Cracked Nails

If the free edge of the nail gets a crack, a nail file or emery board can quickly remedy the problem. However, if the crack works itself down to the attached portion of the nail, a more serious problem develops. The crack or separation creates a pattern for the nail to continue as it moves forward.

The free edge portion of the nail is the only part of the nail that is truly dead. As the nail grows under the cuticles, the free edge is pushed forward. Left alone, the nail grows quite lengthy. It is dead tissue with no connection to the healthy nail. If the crack is part of the new nail growth, than the dead portion will have a continuous crack in it. No amount of filing the free edge will help. If the client seeks professional help from a manicurist in time, the course of the damage can be changed.

Treatment

First, the manicurist files the free edge down close to the top of the connected nail. Second, the the crack is gently buffed down to become smooth and even. Next, a series of massage manipulations are performed to increase the blood flow to the area. The natural process of nutrients getting to the weakened area through the blood flow will give the nail a fighting chance to repair itself.

Aromatherapy is an effective tool in getting nutrients to the spot through vasodilation. Applying the oils and massaging the nail will take just a few moments. This treatment **must** be repeated several times a day for at least one week. Therefore, the manicurist should teach the client how to use the formula at home before retiring at night, and again in the morning. Although probably not practical, it would be even more beneficial to repeat the treatment at least once during the day. Perhaps suggest to the client to do it over a lunch break, since it will take less than one minute to complete.

Aromatherapy Vasodilation Formulas

Formula #1: Using a heater pot or baby bottle warmer, LIGHTLY warm 1 teaspoon sesame oil and add: 2 drops eucalyptus and 1 drop thyme. Stir. Dip a cotton swab into the oil and apply it directly on the nail where the crack had been. Next roll the slightly dampened cotton swab underneath the free edge, concentrating near the con-

necting area. Then in circular movements, manipulate your thumb over the entire nail bed to increase the blood flow.

The sesame oil is rich in Vitamin E, and the thyme and eucalyptus will cause a cool heat sensation. The coloring under the nail will flush.

Other variations will provide the same vasodilation. If the client finds the smell of eucalyptus is too medicinal, substitute peppermint for the eucalyptus. Also, you can split the two drops to 1 peppermint and 1 eucalyptus. Always include the thyme. The one teaspoon will last for several applications.(5–7 treatments).

For one week usage, increase the mixture to the following: Start with 1 tablespoon of sesame oil and add: 8 drops eucalyptus (or split it 4 peppermint and 4 eucalyptus) and 4 drops thyme.

Ingrown Nails

Sometimes clients mention that their mom or grandmother had ingrown nails. This condition could possibly have hereditary patterns to it. What is more likely to have been passed down through the generations is the way clients are taught to cut their nails. Ingrown nails are most often created by improper nail trimming. The large toe nails are the most common nails to become ingrown. Poorly fit, or too tight, shoes can cause the condition, too.

Nail trimming should be left to the professional. Clients seldom attempt to cut their own hair, they leave that job for their hairdresser or barber. They should leave the job of trimming their nails to the manicurist. If they cannot or will not, there are some guidelines the professional can offer.

The nails should be clean and softened. At-home nail trimming should be done immediately after a bath or shower. Leaving at least ¼ inch of free edge from the connecting nail tissue is recommended. Cut straight across, and then use a nail file or emery board to finish the process. This eliminates creating the situation that promotes the ingrown nail.

If the nail is cut too close to the connecting tissue, pressure is created that forces the soft tissue to expand forward, thus forcing the nail to fold under the skin. As the nail attempts to grow forward, it is pushed into the soft tissue and is very painful.

To treat an ingrown nail, the manicurist has to perform the delicate task of lifting the nail up and over the skin. If the condition is

too severe, the client must seek the help of a podiatrist. (Remember: When in doubt, send the client to a doctor!)

A small piece of cotton placed under the curved, ingrown nail will lift the nail and elevate the pressure. The skin will be very tender, red, and sore. Aromatherapy offers assistance in reducing the soreness.

Aromatherapy Calming Formulas for Tender, Red, and Sore Nail Areas

Formula #1: Begin by chilling one ounce Chinese tea and add: 10 drops chamomile and 10 drops patchouli. Blend. Saturate a cotton pad with the solution. Wrap around the sore nail for 15 minutes.

This solution will look almost good enough to drink. The nail will feel better and the redness is dramatically reduced.

Formula #2: Chill one ounce witch hazel and add: 10 drops yarrow and 10 drops violet leaf oil. Blend and follow the same application instructions as in Formula #1.

This mixture will appeal to men, too. The reactions will be similar to Formula #1.

Formula #3: Chill one ounce ginger root tea and add: 10 drops lavender and 10 drops tea tree. Blend and follow application instructions found in Formula #1.

This tea has a very oriental fragrance and is very popular amongst both men and women.

Fungus Growth

The most common of all fungus growth is ringworm, commonly called "athlete's foot." No matter what age group, gender, or activity, anyone can get it. It turns any area between the toes or fingers into swollen, itchy, flaky irritations. The skin often turns white and spongy, like being waterlogged. All it takes to get it is walking barefoot over the exact area that an infected person has just walked barefoot. One time that's all. Swimming pools, Jacuzzis (whirlpool baths), gyms, locker rooms, showers, and public bathrooms are classic areas for the fungus to breed.

If the fungus is left to grow, and it does so *very* quickly, all of your toes can become infected in a matter of days. Then, if toes are scratched to alleviate the itch, the fungus can get trapped under the

fingernail(s) and spread to all of the fingers. Fungi are hearty and indiscriminate for hosts.

There are other kinds of fungi that are similar to the athlete's foot type. They grow due to trapped moisture under acrylic nail coatings or silk wraps. A slight lifting of the acrylic will allow a water or moisture droplet to seep underneath. This fungus grows quickly, too. Women who frequently have their hands in water are most susceptible to fungal growths. Removing the coating is an appropriate first step, but many do not. You can dip the nails in tincture of zinc and/or white vinegar. Dry them thoroughly, afterward.

The good news is that the aromatherapy treatments are just as quick, and effective, as the over-the-counter medicines. Being freshly prepared, they can be whipped together in a minute's notice. The client won't have to keep old cans of medicine around. The aromas from these formulas are strong, although nicer than those of the typical over-the-counter antifungal sprays.

Aromatherapy Formulations for Attacking Fungus Growth

Foot Soak

Formula #1: To eliminate the itch and burning sensations. Pour very warm water (everyone has their own heat comfort level) into a large bowl or bucket, and add: one cup of salt (rock salt [kosher] works well, as does epsom salt.) Stir to dissolve. Then add: 8 drops tea tree, and 4 drops lavender. Stir by swishing the feet around in the water. Soak the feet for 10–15 minutes. Dry the feet very thoroughly.

Antifungal Formulations

Formula #1: Only a very small amount is needed. Mix 1 tsp. wheatgerm oil with 10 drops tea tree and 5 drops patchouli. Saturate a cotton swab and cover the infected areas. Put on latex gloves and massage the oil mixture deep into the skin. Apply this mixture to the infected areas daily, until the fungi are all gone. Instruct client to wear only very clean, white, 100% cotton socks.

Tea tree is very pungent, and most people will not find the aroma terribly appealing. Getting rid of the fungi condition, is worth it.

Formula #2: Mix 1 tsp. jojoba oil with 10 drops lemon oil and 15 drops tagetes. Wear latex gloves. Use a saturated cotton swab and cover the infected areas. Massage ointment into the skin. Apply daily

until it is no longer needed. Instruct client to wear only clean, white, 100% cotton socks.

Tagetes is also unpleasant smelling. The lemon will cut some of the smell, as well as work off the dead, spongy skin cells.

Formula #3: Mix 1 tsp. sesame oil with 20 drops cypress, 4 drops thyme, and 10 drops tea tree. Use the cotton swab and gloves to apply and massage. Apply daily until the fungi are gone. Instruct client to wear only clean, white, 100% cotton socks.

The thyme and tea tree will make the skin tingle. It will be a refreshing change from the itchy, burning sensation caused by the fungus.

A partial list of the essential oils known to have **antifungal properties includes:** balsam de Peru, eucalyptus lemon, hyssop, juniper, lavender, lemon, melissa, myrrh, patchouli, pimiento, sage, sandalwood, sarriette, tagetes, tea tree, and thyme. When making the solution, consider how severe the fungus infection is, and how long it has been present. The formulation will go from very mild to strong. The number of drops to use with a teaspoon of base oil will range from 15–60 drops. There is no ironclad formula measure, you will have to judge each case separately. A very rough guide for measurement is as follows:

MILD: 15–25 drops MODERATE: 25–40 drops

SEVERE: 40–60 drops

CAUTION

Always instruct the client to wear clean, white, 100% cotton socks. It may sound like simple common sense, but make sure the client knows not to wear the same socks more than once, after workouts, or any other reason. Nylon, acrylic blends, and polyester materials will not let the skin breathe like cotton does. Wool is the only other fiber to select for socks. Colored socks are forbidden, because the dye may enter the pores or open wounds, causing further discomfort or damage.