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HANDY TIPS *for* Beautiful Nails

Counteract the effects of extra handwashing and skipped salon visits with our pro tips for nail and hand care. Well-groomed nails make you look instantly polished (pun intended!)—and can even make hands appear more youthful.

by AMINA LAKE ABDELRAHMAN and ALEXIS RHIANNON



Start with a clean slate.

After you wash your hands, make sure nails are thoroughly grime-free by first removing all traces of polish with an acetone-free remover, which won't dry out nails (try GH Beauty Award winner **The Sign Tribe** Nail Polish Remover Cream, \$16, amazon.com). Apply soap to a clean toothbrush, then gently scrub nails and surrounding skin to remove dirt and exfoliate without harsh, drying chemicals, advises Ava Shamban, M.D., a dermatologist in Los Angeles.

HANDLE WITH CARE.

Your nails are delicate, so treat them that way: Avoid using metal tools under nails, as too much digging can cause the nail plate to separate from the skin (a condition called onycholysis), common for people over 50, says Dana Stern, M.D., a dermatologist and nail care specialist in New York. Cleaning with chemicals and washing dishes can also weaken nails. Guard them by wearing rubber, vinyl, nitrile or plastic gloves, says New York City dermatologist Janet Prystowsky, M.D., Ph.D.



GH BEAUTY LAB PICK: OPI CRYSTAL NAIL FILE, \$12, ULTA.COM

Keep a nail file on hand.

If your job or workout routine exposes your nails to potential damage, keep a nail file handy for on-the-spot buffing of any rough edges, Dr. Prystowsky advises. For the smoothest finish, work in one direction with the grain of your nail. Instead of an emery board, which can cause nails to peel and snag, try a glass (also called crystal) nail file. "A glass file will create an even edge on the nail and can even be used on weak, brittle and damaged nails," Dr. Stern says.

CLIP YOUR NAILS REGULARLY.

Consistent trims are as important for your nails as they are for your hair, Dr. Prystowsky says, to make nails less prone to snags and breakage. Aim to clip your tips every two weeks, adjusting frequency as needed.



MOISTURIZE EVERY NIGHT.

You put moisturizer on your face before bed, so do the same for your hands and nails. Apply a mix of almond and avocado oils, says Holly Falcone, a nail expert in New York City, or a nourishing hand cream. "Efficacious formulas contain humectant ingredients like glycerin, emollients such as fatty alcohols or plant oils and occlusives like silicones, which work together to hydrate nails and skin," says GH Beauty Lab chemist Danusia Wnek.

GH BEAUTY LAB PICK: GH BEAUTY LAB TEST WINNER EUCERIN ADVANCED REPAIR HAND CREAM, \$5, DRUGSTORES

Protect your nails with a base coat.

When you're painting your nails at home, don't skip the base coat. This step both shields nails from being stained by polish and helps the color look more saturated and opaque with just one coat, Dr. Prystowsky says. Even without color, "strengthening varnishes leave a shiny, hard coating on nails; reinforce tips, making them appear thicker; and can protect against damage," Wnek explains.

GH BEAUTY LAB PICK: ESSIE STRONG START BASE COAT, \$10, DRUGSTORES



GIVE CUTICLES TLC.

Think twice about cutting or removing them: The cuticle seals the base of the nail, and if this protective layer is disturbed, that can leave you vulnerable to bacteria and infection (as well as painful and unsightly tears). Taking care of your cuticles also helps minimize hangnails, Dr. Stern says. If you need to push back your cuticles, do so once per week after your shower (when skin is soft) using a wooden orange stick, says Debbie Palmer, D.O., the medical director of Dermatology Associates of New York in Harrison, NY. Finish by massaging cuticles and nails with a cuticle oil or treatment. "Serum-like strengtheners are absorbed quickly and typically contain moisturizers to rehydrate dry, brittle nails," Wnek says.

GH BEAUTY LAB PICK: GH BEAUTY AWARD WINNER ISDIN SI-NAILS NAIL STRENGTHENER CUTICLE SERUM TREATMENT, \$30, ISDIN.COM/US

Prioritize nail health over length.

Long nails are elegant, but if you're one who struggles with breakage or hangnails, Dr. Shamban recommends keeping them short, at least for a period of time as you allow them to grow in stronger. A shorter style with rounded edges looks neat and tends to be less likely to snag and easier to manage so you won't have to subject your nails to extra wear and tear.