

The Habit Tic: Onychotillomania

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CASE

A 67-year-old man presented to his primary care physician for routine care. The absence of cuticles was noted on his bilateral thumbnails, and a midline crease with horizontal ridges from the proximal nail fold to the distal nail (Fig. 1). The patient stated that these changes had been present for over a year. He



Figure 1. Nail changes of onychotillomania. Note the midline furrow on the nail plate, with a series of transverse ridges.

admitted to frequent “picking” and biting of the cuticles and repeated hand washing, as evidenced by the xerosis of his fingers.

Habit-tic deformity is a type of onychodystrophy that is classified in a group of disorders known as onychotillomania, which includes entities such as nail biting (onychophagia), nail picking, and finger sucking.¹ The deformity is the result of repetitive nail bed trauma from the conscious or unconscious manipulation of the cuticle. The characteristic findings include a midline furrow in the nail plate, often yellow in color, running the length of the nail, with a series of transverse ridges.² Treatment includes physically covering the nails with bandages or glue to prevent further trauma. In addition, behavioral therapy and SSRIs have been tried, given the obsessive-compulsive nature of the habit.^{3,4} Cessation of the habit leads to complete resolution of the nail changes.

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