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Caring for Brittle Nails

As we get older, the cells that compose our nails tend to shed in clumps rather than singly. This in turn increases the likelihood of splitting and chipping, which makes the nails appear to be brittle. Treatments that work to increase the water content of the nail will make the nails more flexible and less likely to chip and split.

- Liberal use of moisturizers, particularly those that contain alpha-hydroxy acids, will increase the moisture content of the nail. Apply these creams several times daily to the nails and cuticles.
- Avoid repeated wetting and drying of the hands. When the nails dry, evaporation results in a net loss of water from the skin and nail plate.
- Avoid rubbing and friction when engaged in housework, hobbies or other activities, which may result in repetitive minor trauma to the tips of the nails. Wear cotton gloves for these activities; another good choice is dermal silk gloves, sold in camera shops as darkroom gloves. If you are doing wet work, wear cotton liners under rubber or vinyl gloves, or a cotton-lined rubber glove. Wearing a rubber glove alone causes the hands to sweat, which can aggravate the problem.
- Try to use your finger pads, not the fingertips.
- When removing nail polish, use a remover that contains acetate, not acetone.
- Once weekly, remove any nail polish and soak your fingertips in warm water for thirty minutes while reading or watching TV. This allows the nail to absorb water and become more flexible, less brittle. After soaking, apply several coats of enamel to lock in the water that has been absorbed. Using a polish that contains nylon fibers will add strength to the nail plate. Additional coats of enamel may be applied every 1-2 days, which will help protect the nail tips.
- Biotin, a water-soluble vitamin, may add strength to the nail. It may be taken in doses up to a total of 2000 micrograms (mcg) daily.
- Anecdotally, eating one or two servings of gelatin daily may strengthen the nail.

If you have manicures:

- Bring your own set of instruments with you. While most nail salons are quite careful about sterilization, your best protection against infection is to have your own instruments.
- Buff gently and do so only in the direction in which the nail grows, never back and forth.
- Don't push the cuticle back with a metal scraper; a wooden orange stick is less traumatic to the soft cuticle layer.