

BRITTLE NAILS

Brittle nails are a common problem. Approximately 20% of adults suffer from brittle nails at some point in their life. The nail itself may split into various layers. There may be scaling that resembles dry skin. Repeated wetting and drying of the nail makes the problem worse as the nail swells when it is wet and then contracts when it is dry. The repeated cycle of wetting to drying aggravates this brittleness. Individuals who have their hands in water frequently are at greatest risk for this problem.

Soaking the nails in water at bedtime and then applying a moisturizer that contains alpha - hydroxy acids (such as Lac - Hydrin lotion) can help lock in moisture in the nail and help the nail retain its natural resiliency. Sometimes moisturizers worn under a white cotton glove at bedtime can be useful.

Nail enamel can also help prevent water loss from the nail. When nail enamels are used they should be applied no more often than twice a week.

Biotin also can help with nail brittleness. Biotin can be obtained over the counter. The usual dosage that is helpful is 1 - 2 mg daily. Not only can Biotin help with the nail brittleness, but it may actually make the nail thicker.

Controlling humidity in your home can also help with brittle nails. A dry environment such as a school building or nursing home may not have humidity greater than 40%. Brittle nails are more problematic when humidity drops to low levels such as during the winter months. Protecting the nails with gloves can be quite helpful depending on your individual circumstances. Cotton liners or cotton gloves should be worn within the rubber gloves so as to absorb sweat and provide a more controlled environment