Brittle Nails

The common condition of brittle nails is often not definitively linked with any known cause. Nonetheless, natural medicine may be able to help strengthen brittle nails.

Most conditions that affect nails are unrelated to nutrition; instead they are caused by a lack of oxygen associated with lung conditions, hemorrhage due to infection, or inflammation around the nail due to infection. If there is any question about what the problem is, it is important to get a diagnosis from a healthcare practitioner.

Nutritional supplements that may be helpful: Nutrition can affect the health of nails in a variety of ways. Iron deficiency can cause spoon-shaped nails.¹ For years, some doctors of natural medicine have believed that zinc deficiency can cause white spots to appear on nails.² In China, excessive selenium has been linked to nails actually falling out.³

Biotin, a B vitamin, is known to strengthen hooves in animals. As a result, Swiss researchers investigated the use of biotin in strengthening brittle fingernails in humans, despite the fact that it remains unclear exactly how biotin affects nail structure.⁴ Using 2.5 mg of biotin per day, women with brittle nails who had nail thickness measured before and after six to fifteen months, found their nail thickness increased by 25%. As a result, splitting of nails was reduced. In a follow-up study of people who had been taking biotin for brittle nails in America, 63% showed improvement from taking biotin.⁵ Although the amount of research on the subject is quite limited and positive effects do not appear in all people, people with brittle nails may want to consider a trial period of at least several months using 2.5 mg per day of biotin.

Are there any side effects or interactions? Refer to the individual supplement for information about any side effects or interactions.

Herbs that may be helpful: Anecdotal reports suggest that horsetail may be of some use in the treatment of brittle nails.

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