

Ask Leyla: What's causing my brittle nails?

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Q: My fingernails are so brittle! Do you have any suggestions?

A: Onychoschizia, or brittle nails, is more common in women than men according to the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology (AOCD). The first thing to find out is what's causing your nails to split or be brittle. There may be external or internal causes.

If you've been heeding the advice to wash your hands often to prevent the spread of COVID-19, that's reason alone for brittle nails. Moreover, hand sanitizers are notorious for drying skin and nails when used regularly.

Cleaning and disinfecting without the protection of rubber gloves will also set you up for very dry and brittle nails. Indoor hot and dry environments during the winter also add to this risk.

Manicure much? Acetone used in removing nail polish is a harsh chemical to fingernails (and toenails) causing or exacerbating dry and brittle nails.

An internal cause may be anemia. It's a common cause of brittle nails among menstruating women especially, but can cause nail changes in anyone with anemia.

Thyroid disorders that cause too little or too many hormones contribute to brittle nails because these conditions affect the body's absorption of minerals.

Age is a factor in the strength of nails which naturally decreases over time. This may be a reason for splitting or brittle nails. There's a higher incidence of anemia or chronic disease in this age group too.

A good clue to the cause of your brittle nails—whether it's internal or external—according to the AOCD: If only the fingernails are split or brittle and the toenails are strong, an external factor may be the cause.

If you think the cause of your brittle nails is internal and not due to

exposure to water, detergents and manicures, best to check with your doctor for a thorough assessment. A qualified nutritionist can then help to address your deficiencies and conditions and develop a personalized protocol for healthy, strong nails.

To your health!