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## WHITE SPOTS ON THE NAILS (LEUKONYCHIA)

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### WHAT IS IT?

It's common to see white spots, dots, or streaks on the nails. This isn't something to worry about; it doesn't indicate a calcium, zinc, vitamin, or other deficiency. Often, it's simply caused by bumping your fingertip against something. The white spots naturally move to the tip of the nail and then disappear. Some people only have a single white spot on one nail, while others experience it frequently and on multiple nails at once. The medical term for white discoloration on the nail is leukonychia (which simply means a white nail).

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

There are many variations. The most common are small white dots or spots. This is also called leukonychia punctata. Sometimes there are crosswise stripes (leukonychia striata). The nail can also be completely white (leukonychia totalis).



### HOW DO WHITE SPOTS ON THE NAIL OCCUR?

White spots often develop spontaneously, without any apparent cause. They can also develop after bumping or damaging the base of the nail, or snagging your fingers. This is thought to be the cause, because white spots on the nail occur more frequently on fingernails, which are more exposed to damage, than on toenails. They are also more common in children than in the elderly, and there too, the idea exists that children bump their nails more often. Everyone bumps and damages their nails and fingers constantly, but then forgets about it. Because the nail grows out very slowly, it's difficult to connect the moment of damage with the appearance of a white spot weeks later.

White spots can also arise from an infection and from some skin diseases. Nails are actually part of the skin, just like hair. They are keratinized outgrowths of the skin. If there's something wrong with the skin, you can often see it (but months later) in the nails and hair. A white line or dent that appears in the nail and slowly moves toward the nail tip can also be the result of an illness suffered 1-3 months ago, such as the flu, a sore throat, a cold, or a skin infection somewhere on the body. White spots or even dents can also appear later in the nail after a period of oxygen deficiency or a serious internal illness. This is seen, for example, in cases of anemia, heart disease, or liver disease.

## **WHITE SPOTS ON THE NAILS DUE TO SKIN DISORDERS**

Skin conditions on the hands or elsewhere on the body can also affect the nails. Nails can change shape and become thickened or brittle, and spots can also appear. White discoloration of the nails can occur in conditions such as chronic eczema, psoriasis, nail fungus, Darier's disease, and alopecia areata.

### **SHOULD I GO TO THE GP OR DERMATOLOGIST?**

Occasional white spots on a few nails are not unusual. It's not a reason to see a doctor, and there's no need to investigate. If all nails consistently have white spots, and especially if grooves and dents also develop, there could be an underlying condition. However, this is rare, and those who experience this don't go to the doctor for spots on their nails; they've already gone weeks earlier for the underlying condition that causes symptoms like fatigue or shortness of breath.

### **WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?**

There's not much you can do. Be careful with your nails, don't pick too much, don't bump them, and don't bite your nails. The white spots will disappear on their own as the nail grows out. Those who are seriously bothered by the white spots can camouflage them with opaque nail polish. Artificial nails can also be a solution. You often read online that white spots on the nail are caused by a calcium or zinc deficiency, but that's not true. Research has been conducted on people with white spots on their nails, and they didn't have a calcium or zinc deficiency. However, they often had professions, hobbies, or activities that constantly damaged their nails.

