

## Natural Nail Care: More Than a Manicure

By Kathi Berson

Natural nail care continues to be a trendsetter for the year as women are opting for a cleaner, less complicated look. Fashion magazines are featuring models with shorter, active length nails, and beauty manufacturers are marketing an increased array of products that cater to the health and growth of natural nails.

This trend is in keeping with the simultaneous emergence of the spa in all its forms, from destination to resorts to day spas. “We’ve seen natural nails boom because of an emergence of the spa craze and all things natural,” comments Hannah Lee, managing editor of *Nails Magazine*, an industry trade publication. “There is a definite trend back to natural nail care,” adds Linda Lewis of *DaySpa Magazine*. “Natural nail care has allowed nail services to be more inclusive than exclusive, which means the development of a different kind of nail clientele, one who will go through a series of treatments to get the effect desired. And as not to diminish the spa atmosphere with the mess and chemical smells of acrylic applications, many spas have opted to forgo this practice all together.”

### Under Scrutiny

With a surge of reports from the medical community and the media on the detrimental effects of artificial enhancements, women are shying away from these nail salon services. Many hospitals have called for a ban on artificial nails, specifically acrylic nails, on health care workers. “Nurses who wear artificial fingernails harbor much higher levels of bacteria than other nurses, and even routine hand-washing with antibacterial soap may not be enough to kill the pathogens, according to a new report. The study, presented at the Interscience Conference of Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy in San Francisco, indicated that 73% of artificial nails harbored harmful pathogens before hand-washing, compared with 32% for real nails.” (Schreiber, Chris, *Nursesweek*, October 11, 1999.) In the *American Journal of Infection Control 2002*, Dr. Lisa Saiman comments, “Artificial nail products can damage natural nails and increase the risk of fungal and bacterial infections.”

### Beyond Manicures

With the number of artificial nail clients on the decline, salons are looking to other ways to supplement income for their establishments. They are increasingly including add-on services to their menus, such as hand-facials that incorporate exfoliants, peels and masks for the

hands. According to the *Nails Fact Book 2001-2002*, “The most welcome news in this year’s study is that salons are branching out, offering more services than ever before. Not only are they adding on little extras like aromatherapy massage and waxing, for example, they’re also expanding each service category.” In addition, salon professionals are more actively advising clients on how to grow stronger, healthier natural nails. Advice typically incorporates purchase of products that can treat weak, thin or damaged nails and hydrate tough, dry cuticles.

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Despite the trend toward natural nails, women still are in search of the “holy grail” of achieving ten fingernails that are all at the same desired length. Until now, there have been only two options for a woman to reach and maintain this goal. She could either grow her shorter nails with or without the aid of strengtheners or she could opt for artificial enhancements. Growing nails takes time, and taking time runs counter to society’s desire for instant gratification. On the other hand (no pun intended), artificial nails addressed the quest for nails *now*. Unfortunately, artificial nails also

can damage the natural nails underneath the enhancements.

In the application of artificial nails, the integrity of the natural nail is compromised to some degree. The basic steps in application require pushing back the eponychium under the cuticle where the shiny, protective coat of the natural nail is produced. In addition, aggressive filing and buffing remove any remaining shiny protective coat. These steps are taken to ensure the adhesion of the artificial product to the nail surface. Then, the nail surface is often degraded further with the application of a primer designed to completely dehydrate the nail.

### **“Growing natural nails takes time.”**

The application issues don't even take into account the many other problems associated with some artificial nail services: questionable ingredients in products, environmental quality issues concerning chemical odors and dust, and fungus and mold exposure resulting from improper application. Despite these problems, many women continue to opt for artificial enhancements to satisfy their quest for instant length rather than commit to the time and commitment of growing strong, healthy natural nails.

Artificial nails require compromise—beauty, but at a cost.

Healthy natural nails require patience and commitment.

### **Challenges to Natural**

Most women also face challenges when trying to grow strong, healthy natural nails. Their nails may be soft and peeling or they may be dry and brittle. Many are able to grow their nails, but find that they break at a certain length, usually shorter than the desired length. Sometimes, just a few nails will break, causing nails to all be at different lengths.

To overcome these challenges, women have turned to everything from gelatin pills to miracle products sold on late-night infomercials. Some solutions work; some do not. The products that work offer protection of the nails and encourage growth. They also, however, require patience and commitment. Nails take a long time to grow, and it can take a minimum of three months to grow out the entire, new healthier natural nail. Also, products that work require repetitive application, often daily. It's no surprise that given their quest for instant gratification, women have turned to artificial enhancements for the quick fix.

### **The Natural Alternative**

In the fall of 2002, another option emerged that will enable women to have instant length with no damage. It's a professional service that extends nails from underneath the free edge of the

natural nail. It requires no damaging nail preparation as in traditional artificial services. And, because the enhancements are placed underneath the nail, the top of the nail is left exposed for treatment with therapeutic strengtheners to encourage new, healthy nail growth. It's the natural alternative to existing artificial services, and it has revolutionized the way nails can be extended.

To better understand how a natural alternative service benefits the natural nail, it will help to have a basic understanding of applied nail physiology as it relates to nail growth. The majority of new nail growth comes from the nail matrix. The nail matrix consists of two areas: the germinal matrix (behind the cuticle) and the sterile matrix (underneath the nail plate). The nail matrix creates thickness of the nail plate. The eponychium, a membrane underneath the cuticle, produces a much smaller amount of new nail growth but serves an important role in protection of the nail. The eponychium manufactures the shiny coat on top of the nail that adds to the smoothness of the nail surface and protects the nail plate from harmful outside agents. This shiny coat resists dirt and staining, resists peeling and flaking, and is relatively waterproof, keeping nails from softening.

When a woman opts to aid growth of her natural nails by using

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therapeutic strengtheners, she applies strengtheners to the top of the nail. If the strengthener works properly, it will encourage growth at the germinal matrix, it will speed up the integration of new growth along the sterile matrix, and it will protect the shiny coat produced by the eponychium.

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In a professional natural alternative service, the growth process of the natural nail is uninterrupted. The application steps are as follows:

- The nail is prepared with a brush-on solution that cleanses the nail plate and the underside of the free-edge of the nail.

- The nail technician adheres a support, a patented lengthening device that fits snugly under the free edge of the natural nail the support serves as a foundation to extend the length of the nail while simultaneously reinforcing it.

- Once in place, the technician uses a brush-on bonder to seal the support to the stress area of the nail and provide a smooth transition between the natural nail and the support.

- The nail technician finishes the nail by shaping it and beveling all edges.

- Now that the nail is extended, the nail technician can apply a therapeutic strengthener to the entire nail plate before polishing.

The entire process leaves the eponychium in tact and incorporates strengtheners to aid the matrix in doing its job—producing new nail growth.

The natural alternative service culminates years of research, testing and development. The service was further recognized by the American Beauty Association, winning an ABBIES award for the best marketing for new in-salon use products in nail care for 2002. As women continue to strive for longer, beautiful nails, there is finally a “natural alternative” to artificial services that delivers instant length without damage.

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