

Love Gel Manicures? Your Natural Nails Don't.

New research says they could lead to nail thinning and brittleness—and skin cancer risk.

By Jamie Ducharme | Hub Health | March 5, 2013 3:50 pm



Hand in UV Dryer photo via Shutterstock

Last month we reported on the crazy amount of chemicals in the average bottle of nail polish, and unfortunately the bad news doesn't stop there. Brace yourself, manicure lovers, because new research from the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) says the trendy gel manicure could be hazardous to your health, too.

Gel manicures, beloved for their long-lasting, chip-free finish, are also linked to health conditions like nail brittleness and thinning, skin irritation, and even skin cancer, according to a new report by the AAD. The nail brittleness and thinning, the AAD explains, is likely a result of either the chemical-heavy gel formula, the 10- to 15-minute acetone soaks needed to remove the polish, or a combination of the two. Acetone soaks are also to blame for skin irritation, dried out nails, and possible allergic reactions.

If that's not enough to make you cancel your nail salon appointment, how about this: Since UV lamps are used to set the gel polish, frequent exposure could mean an increased risk for skin cancer. Plus, the report notes that constantly having polish on nails could mask any tumors or infections that have already formed, making early intervention far more difficult.

Also, let's not forget, of course nail salons want you to get the gel or the Shellac polish because then you have to go back to soak it off. Unless you have a steady hand, the at-home products just aren't the same.

Sensibly, the AAD recommends gel manicure moderation. **Dr. Chris Adigun, an AAD dermatologist and assistant professor of dermatology at the New York University School of Medicine, says in the report to limit these manicures to an occasional indulgence.** When you do get them, **Adigun** says to wear sunscreen on the hands, soak only the nails—not surrounding skin—in acetone during removal, rehydrate the nails using petroleum jelly or other moisturizers, and to ask your manicurist not to alter the cuticle in order to prevent inflammation and infection. The report quotes **Adigun**:

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“In general, any manicure left in place for an extended period of time is not a good idea because you are not seeing what is going on underneath the nail polish,” said Dr. Adigun. “As is the case with most things, moderation is the key when it comes to gel manicures. If you get them regularly, you need to be aware of the possible consequences and see a board-certified dermatologist if a persistent nail problem develops.”

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With the scary study results piling up, all we can say is letting nails go au naturel is getting more and more appealing each day. Well, at least for a few days, right? No-chip nails just aren't worth skin cancer in our book.

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