

The Waterlogged Hands Rescue Card

For hands that live in water. Stick it above the sink.

why they split

A nail is porous. It swells when it is wet and shrinks when it dries. Do that once and nothing happens. Do it fifteen times a day — dishes, handwashing, mop bucket, baby bath — and the layers come apart, like plywood left out in the rain. That is why it splits at the tip and nowhere else.

It is not a vitamin problem. You cannot out-supplement a tap you turn on fifteen times a day.

the daily routine (four minutes, total)

- Morning: ointment on damp hands, not dry. You are sealing water in, not adding it.
- After every wet task: dry properly, including between the fingers, then oil the cuticles.
- Before bed: ointment again, thicker. This is the one that does the work, because you are not washing it off for eight hours. Cotton gloves over the top if you can stand them.
- Once a week: file in one direction with a glass file. One pass. No sawing back and forth.

the glove rules nobody tells you

- Twenty minutes maximum in a waterproof glove. After that your own sweat has you right back in a wet-dry cycle inside the glove.
- Cotton liners underneath. About six dollars, and they change more than anything else on this card.
- Powder-free nitrile, not latex — fewer allergy problems and they do not degrade in cleaning products.
- Check the size selector when you order. Most glove listings default to Small.

what to buy

Generic on purpose. Any brand that matches the description works.

- ☐ A petrolatum ointment in a tub (the big one — you will use it)
- ☐ A ceramide cream for daytime, when ointment is impractical
- ☐ Jojoba oil for cuticles — a plain bottle, not a branded pen at four times the price
- ☐ A glass nail file
- ☐ Acetone-free remover for regular polish
- ☐ Powder-free nitrile gloves + cotton liners

what does not work

- Lotion. It is mostly water. It evaporates and leaves you drier than you started.
- Biotin on its own. One small 1990 study, about a third improved, and it took six months. It will not outrun mechanical damage — and it interferes with lab tests, including the one used to check for a heart attack. Tell whoever draws your blood that you take it.
- Cutting the cuticle. It is a seal, not a decoration.
- Nail hardeners on an already-brittle nail. Hard and strong are not the same thing.

Taking Gel Off Without Wrecking Your Nails

Twenty-five boring minutes. Tape it inside the bathroom cabinet.

The whole rule: cured gel grips the top layer of your nail.

If you pick it off, that layer comes with it. The white chalky patches afterwards are the damage, and they only grow out — four to six months on a fingernail, most of a year on a toe.

the seven steps

1. Buff the shine off the top coat. Lightly. You are scratching the seal, not sanding off the color.
2. Petrolatum ointment on the cuticle and the skin around every nail. Nobody does this. Do this.
3. Soak cotton in 100% acetone — not "remover," not the acetone-free kind. Lint-free rounds torn in half.
4. Wrap so it cannot breathe. Plastic food wrap seals tighter than foil and drips less; reusable clips also work.
5. Wait ten to fifteen minutes. Leave the room. Checking early is how the picking starts.
6. Unwrap one nail at a time and push, almost flat, with a plastic or wooden pusher. If it resists, rewrap that nail for five more minutes. Resistance never means push harder.
7. Wash, then jojoba oil into the nail and cuticle, then ointment over the top.

never

- Never pick at a lifted edge. This is the entire injury.
- Never file it off with an electric bit, and be wary of a salon that does.
- Never peel-off base coats. Same damage, friendlier name.

the next seven days

- Ointment or a ceramide cream into the nails and cuticles every night for a week. Acetone strips the lipids out of the skin, not just the nail.
- No filing, buffing or "smoothing the ridges" for two days. A soft nail files unevenly and you will thin it.
- One to two weeks bare between gel manicures. The industry hates this advice. It is still the answer.
- If you get gel regularly: sunscreen on the backs of your hands, or fingerless UV gloves, before the lamp.

see a doctor about

- A nail lifting away from the nail bed, or a gap under it
- Green, black or brown discoloration under or in the nail — especially a new dark streak running lengthways
- Pain, swelling or pus around the nail fold
- Nail changes that arrive suddenly and affect several nails at once

None of this is medical advice, and a nail that is changing shape or color is a dermatologist's question, not mine.