PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

What is longitudinal melanonychia?

Longitudinal melanonychia (LM) is a dark line that shows up on the fingernails and toenails. The line can look brown, gray, or black. It usually goes in a straight line from the bottom of the nail to the tip. It can happen on one nail or more than one.

WHAT CAUSES LONGITUDINAL MELANONYCHIA?

The line happens when special cells in the nail (called pigment cells or melanocytes) make more color than normal. This can be caused by:

- Normal changes, especially in people with darker skin tones
- Small injuries to the nail
- Certain medicines
- A mole or birthmark
- Very rarely, skin cancer under the nail

IS LONGITUDINAL MELANONYCHIA DANGEROUS?

Most of the time, and especially in kids, LM is not dangerous. It is usually a normal change, but it is always a good idea for a doctor to check the nail to make sure. If the line changes quickly, looks uneven, or spreads, it could mean something more serious, like skin cancer. That is why it is important to have your doctor look at the nail and keep checking on it over time. During a check-up, your doctor might measure the line, take pictures of it, and look at it with a special tool called a dermatoscope.

HOW DO I MONITOR LONGITUDINAL MELANONYCHIA?

Look at the nail from time to time. Let your dermatologist know if you notice:

- The color changing
- The line getting wider
- The color spreading to the skin around the nail
- A bump under the nail
- The nail splitting above the line

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