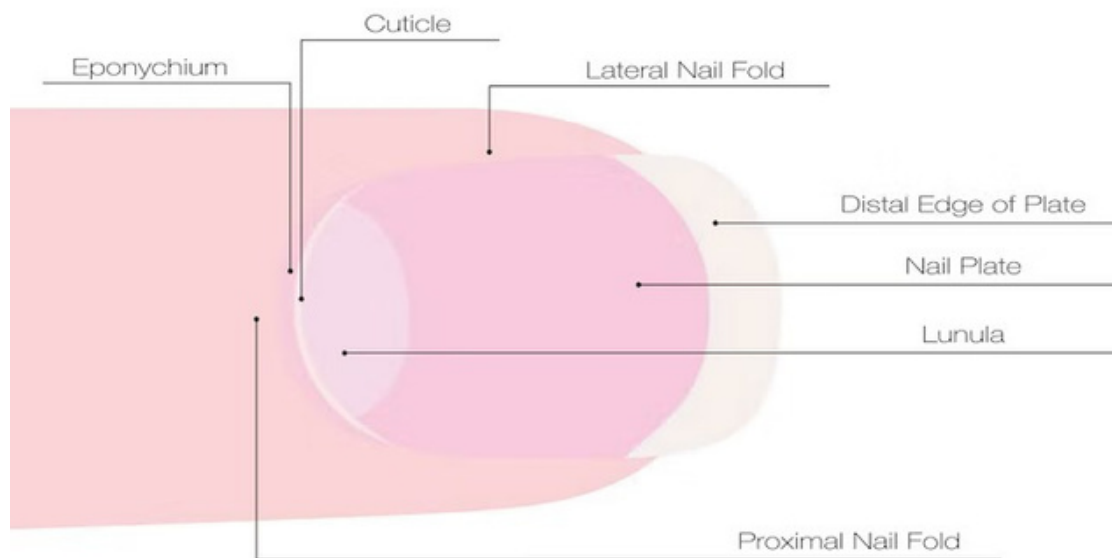


## Cuticle Guide: Parts of a Cuticle and How to Take Care of Them

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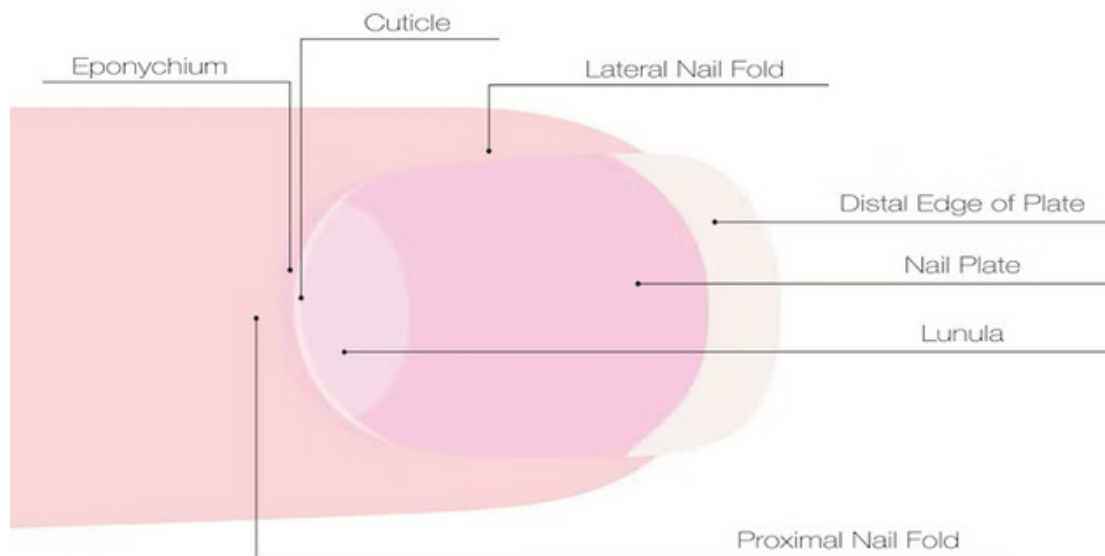
### What is a Cuticle and How to Take Care of Them

Protect your clients and their health with our guide to properly identifying and working with cuticles.

The most common misconception when it comes to cuticles is: What exactly is the cuticle? You may think you know, but guess again; many nail technicians identify the wrong part of the nail when talking about the cuticle. To help, take our quick lesson in nail anatomy and refer to our diagram to follow along. You'll see three very important parts: the nail matrix, eponychium and cuticle.

First, identify the nail matrix: This is the small area of living tissue below the eponychium that creates nail cells. The main job of the eponychium is to protect the nail matrix from anything that could infect it. But it's differing between the eponychium and the cuticle that confuses many nail technicians. According to Doug Schoon, CND chief scientific advisor and author of *Nail Structure and Product Chemistry*, the eponychium is the area of living skin that borders the base of the nail plate. This is easily confused with the cuticle, which is actually the non-living tissue that adheres to the nail plate. Schoon writes that the that the cuticle sheds from the underside of the eponychium,

so the two may seem like the same thing, but take note—they're definitely not! During a manicure, you can push back the eponychium to expose and remove the cuticle, but do not place any instrument underneath the nail fold itself. This can lead to injury and infection.



Cuticle care is an important element to any nail service, but it can only be helpful if it's done right. Keep reading to learn what a nail tech should do to perform correct cuticle care.

## Step It Up

### How to Properly Remove a Cuticle

1. After you have removed nail polish or product from the nails, begin prepping the nails by applying cuticle remover and then soaking hands in warm water mixed with a soak to soften skin and cuticles. After a few minutes, remove hands and dry them with a clean towel.

2. Choose your tool:

You can either use a metal cuticle pusher with a spoon shape, which is more efficient and easier to use, or an orangewood stick. In states that don't allow metals implements, your best bet is the orangewood stick—it's a classic!

3. Keep a Firm Grip:

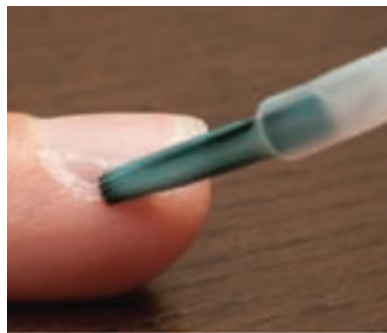
Hold your tool the same way you would hold a pencil; keep your grip light but firm. Place the edge of the tool against the eponychium and gently press against it. The eponychium should slide back, exposing the cuticle. Repeat these steps on other nails. If you are using a pusher, make sure that you dull any rough or sharp edges with a nail file before pushing the cuticle.

4. Now that the cuticle is exposed, you can remove the non-living tissue from the nail plate. If you're applying enhancements, any remaining cuticle will interfere with the adhesion of the product to the nail plate—hello lifted enhancements. It's also a problem for a simple polish job.

To properly remove the cuticle, Schoon recommends using a curette, a flat scraper blade or an orangewood stick. With the help of cuticle remover, it isn't difficult to scrape off the non-living tissue without damaging the nail plate. Do not use nippers or an electric file to remove the cuticle. The electric file causes friction that can burn through the nail plate.

And nippers should only be used to cut off a dead skin tag, which is a little bit of dead skin sticking up around the nails.

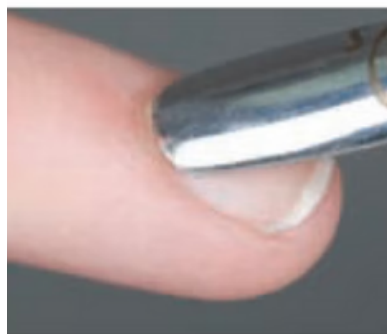
Note: To properly remove a dead skin tag, use nippers with a sharp blade and cut the dead skin above the level of living skin. Don't grab and pull the dead skin tag; the sharp nipper blades should offer a clean cut.



**Cuticle Remover**



**Orangewood Stick**



**Cuticle Pusher**



**Cuticle Oil**

## **In Case of a Cuticle Cutting Accident...**

You would obviously never intentionally cut a client, but sometimes it accidentally happens. In the unlikely event that you cut a client with your tools, follow these extremely important steps:

Stop the service immediately. Schoon advises that you take the universal precaution of assuming that client has an infectious disease and treat your station as such. Any implements that were used on the client should be set aside. Before using them again, thoroughly scrub them to remove any debris, and then properly disinfect them. If you're using implements that cannot be disinfected, throw them away, double bagged.

Take care of your client. Send your client to wash her hands thoroughly. Cover any cuts with a Band-Aid to protect the wound from further exposure. Don't dispense any medicine, but rather tell your client to apply antibacterial medication when she gets home. If she sees any signs of redness or irritation, then she should consult a physician.

Protect yourself. You should already be wearing gloves during the service, so the first step is to peel them off and throw them away. Wash your hands thoroughly. Inspect your station carefully for any signs of possible contaminants and follow the proper procedure. Again, throw away what can't be properly disinfected.

You should never continue working on the finger that has been cut. As a nail technician, you already know that you are not licensed to work on open wounds or sores. As for the rest of the fingers, if they are unharmed, then it's up to you to decide to continue the service.

\*Special thanks to the experts who contributed to this article: Doug Schoon, CND chief scientific officer and author of *Nail Structure and Product Chemistry*, and information from *Art & Science of Nail Technology and Cosmetic Dermatology Products & Procedures* edited by Zoe Diana Draelos.

## **The Pros and Cons of Cuticle Remover**

You may prefer to use cuticle remover when prepping cuticles for a service, but others feel that it's not necessary. Most cuticle removers contain potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide plus humectants and allow for the gentle removal of non-living skin attached to the nail plate while avoiding any potential mechanical trauma. It's applied for 5–10 minutes to soften cuticles adhered to the nail plate, and is extremely easy to use, so you can understand the benefits. But as with everything good, there's a downside. Possible complications include softening the nail plate and removing too much of the cuticle, plus there's the potential for paronychia (a bacterial infection causing redness and swelling of the eponychium or lateral sidewalls) and secondary bacteria and *Candida* infections, according to *Cosmetic Dermatology Products & Procedures* edited by Zoe Diana Draelos. The choice is up to you, but if you choose to use, make sure to do a spot test on your clients first—you don't want any allergic reactions at your table!

## Definitions

**Ep·o·ny·chi·um:** The area of living skin that borders the base of the nail plate and usually covers all of the nail matrix, except the lunula.

**Cu·ti·cle:** The thin layer of colorless dead tissue between the eponychium and the nail plate that forms a seal to keep dirt and debris from harming the matrix area.

*Images: Hannah Ross*