

Boost your nail health from the inside out with these seven manicure-fortifying foods.

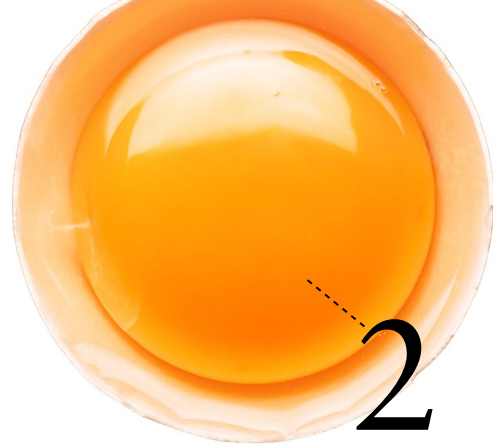
# Superfoods FOR YOUR NAILS

By Marcy Lovitch

A truth we know all too well: Great manicures look best on gorgeous, healthy nails. Another truth we know: Not everyone is genetically blessed with strong talons. Not to fear; your tips may need some help—and that help can come from eating certain foods. Eating a well-balanced diet results in smooth, firm nails free from spots or discoloration. Here, we feature seven nail-fortifying foods that can strengthen, hydrate and boost your nails' overall appearance.



**1. SPINACH** and other dark leafy greens, such as kale, arugula, romaine, chicory, mustard and collard greens all contain folate, a B vitamin that helps your body repair and make new cells, especially in your skin and nails. “Folate plays a role in the formation of red blood cells, which are responsible for carrying oxygen to our cells,” says Wendy Bazilian, DrPH and RD, a registered dietician in San Diego, California, and author of *The SuperfoodsRx Diet* (Rodale). Not getting enough folate in your diet can result in lackluster, dull nails. “Well-nourished and oxygenated cells mean an all-over healthier you and more vital-looking nails,” says Bazilian. Since folate helps your cells work and tissues grow, you should eat folate-rich foods to encourage nail growth. Besides dark leafy greens, other foods with folate include broccoli, lentils, legumes, beets, asparagus, cauliflower, beef liver, whole grains, fortified cereals and citrus fruits.



**2. EGGS** serve as a good source of protein, and protein-packed foods play an important part of nail health. Why? Your nails actually consist primarily of a fibrous protein called keratin, the foundation of a strong nail. Eating foods containing high amounts of protein provide your body with amino acids needed for keratin production. “Keratin is the fundamental building block of nails (and hair), and any keratin deficiencies can result in weak and brittle nails,” says Soheil Simzar, MD, a dermatologist with AVA MD Dermatology in Los Angeles, California. While most of us associate meat as a main protein source—and it is—many other foods, such as dairy, fish (especially salmon), nuts, beans, whole grains, tofu and soybeans, provide it.

**3. FLAXSEEDS** supply the essential plant-based, omega-3 fatty acids your nails require for durability (i.e. to prevent cracking, splitting or flaking). Omega-3 essential fatty acids contain natural hydrating properties





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to moisturize the nail bed from the inside out (so long dryness!) and increase the suppleness of fragile or thin nails. Another plus: The fats also feed the body essential nutrients for the formation of healthy cells, help reduce inflammation in the body and improve overall blood flow, Simzar says. Boost your everyday intake by adding ground flaxseeds to a smoothie or mixing them into cereal, and include healthy servings of avocados, walnuts, sardines, salmon, chia seeds and walnuts in your diet.

**4. TURKEY** offers up a good amount of iron, as does chicken, lamb, fish and lean beef. Iron enriches red blood cells and increases the oxygen level of tissue, especially in nails that are weak or those pale in color. If your nails tend to break easily, you may need to eat foods with more iron. A chronic iron deficiency can also affect the appearance of a smooth surface in the form of washboard ridges or can contribute to spoon-shaped nails (a condition called koilonychia), in which the nails break easily, are soft and appear concave and scooped out—like the bowl of a spoon. You can get more iron by eating certain iron-fortified cereals, dried fruits, liver, tuna, nuts, potatoes (including the skin), spinach and both navy and lima beans. Foods chockfull of vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and bell peppers, help your body absorb the mineral, so make sure to add a serving of these good-for-you foods with your iron-packed bites.



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**5. SWISS CHARD** supplies a nice serving of biotin, a water soluble B vitamin that encourages the production of protein for nail growth. Biotin gets absorbed into the core of the nail, which is the part where cells are generated, so it encourages nail growth. It can also increase nail firmness and hardness, reducing the tendency for splitting. Sources of biotin include halibut, eggs, peanuts, peanut butter, almonds, yogurt, whole grain breads and berries, such as strawberries and raspberries.

**6. OYSTERS** act as an excellent source of zinc, a nutrient that keeps the immune system operating properly. The mineral additionally promotes cell reproduction and repair, and is necessary for tissue growth. “Zinc is critical; it helps convert chemicals in the food we eat into a form that the body’s tissues will accept,” says Ella Toombs, M.D., a Washington D.C.-based dermatologist and spokesperson



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for the American Academy of Dermatology. Poor nail growth as well as white spots or flecks and washboard ridges on nails have been linked to a diet low in zinc. Your best bet for a zinc infusion comes via seafood, such as crab, lobster, scallops and shrimp, and other foods including baked beans, yogurt, cashews, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds and oats.

**7. OLIVE OIL** features vitamin E, a fat-soluble vitamin and antioxidant. In addition to its antioxidant properties that protect cells from the damaging effects of free radicals, vitamin E also increases blood circulation and flow to your nails, so it may positively affect growth. Increase your vitamin E intake by dressing your salad with vinaigrette made from virgin olive or sunflower oil. Other vitamin E-rich foods include squash, pumpkin, almonds, hazelnuts, broccoli, spinach and rainbow trout. And if you suffer from dry, cracked nails or cuticles, try applying vitamin E *topically* from a gel caplet. **NI!**



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