

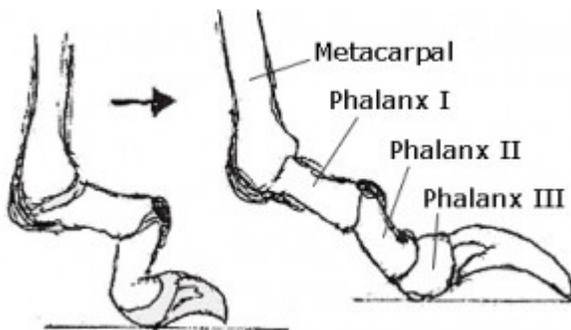
Why long toe nails are harmful to your dog's health

By [Bridget Wessel](#) • October 1, 2008 • [Blog](#) • Comments Off

Some dogs hate nail trimming, others merely tolerate it, almost none like it. Some dogs need tranquilizers to make it through the process without biting, while others sleep through the procedure without a care. No matter what your dog's personal take is on nail clipping, it is something you should do for your IGs regularly to keep from harming their skeletal structure.

A dog's nails are important parts of their anatomy. Unlike cats, dog claws are not weapons, but are used when he runs to grip the ground when accelerating and turning corners. Outdoor dogs run around enough over different surfaces and wear their own nails down. But our house-bound companions don't get that natural wear from carpet, hardwood, or vinyl flooring. And since IGs have nails that grow more quickly than most other breeds, it's easy for them to get too long.

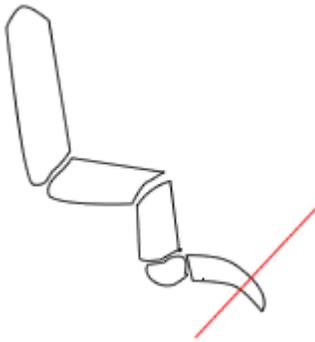
Having long nails changes the way a dog carries himself. The diagram below shows how a long nail causes the bones in the foot to flatten and the Metacarpal, Phalanx I and Phalanx II bones to sit more angled every time the dog walks or stands. The different angle of the bones when pressure is applied causes joint stress and can lead to joint pain and arthritis. It also leads to dropped wrists which make the dog look flat footed. Women reading this article can probably relate if they think about wearing high heels all the time. Long toe nails essentially do the same to dogs by changing the natural alignment of leg bones which adds torque or twisting to the joints. Personally, high heeled shoes wreak havoc on my knees and I suffer from knee joint pain for days after wearing them. I can't imagine the pain a dog goes through whose owner never trims his nails or doesn't trim nails often enough.



Left: proper alignment with short toenail. Right: angled alignment because of long toenail.
Image provided by Dr. Lisa Kluslow

Changing the natural alignment also makes the dog less steady on his feet and can contribute to an increased probability of broken legs. If the dog's joints are out of whack, he can't catch himself from falling or landing as well. Again, if you compare how steady you ladies are in sneakers compared to high heels you can relate to how a dog with long nails might feel all the time. Since broken legs are already such a problem for Italian Greyhounds, this makes keeping your Iggy's nails trimmed even more important.

The image shows how the bones of the paw and wrist angle back when a dog has long nails, but the damage doesn't stop there. All the bones in a dog's body are connected and the leg bones connect all the way up to the spine. Some of you might relate to how an injury on one part of our body can cause us to carry ourselves differently and create pain in another part of our body. Unfortunately, our dogs can't tell us when they have a headache or shoulder ache and many times we miss the slight signals that they are in pain. Since dogs can't trim their own nails, it's up to us to make sure this dog maintenance is performed before the pain sets in.



Where to cut a dog's toe nail.

IGs usually need their nails trimmed every two to three weeks, if not more often. Frequent walking (daily, fast paced, long walks) can help wear down nails and increase the time between trimmings. For our dogs, nail trimming is a two person job and my husband holds dogs on his lap with their feet sticking outwards while I clip. The red line in the diagram to the left shows where to cut the nail. The nail comes straight out, and at the point where it starts to bend downward, you should cut at a 45 degree angle. It's always a good idea to have

Kwik Stop or another blood stopping product on hand in case you hit the quick. If trimming nails is not your forte, groomers or vet clinics are good alternatives to keep your dogs' nails well groomed.

Some dog owners prefer to grind down (commonly using a Dremel tool) their dog's nails. For comprehensive instructions on how to Dremel your dog's nails, please refer to Tia Resleure's article ["The Importance of Proper Nail Grooming to Dogs, especially Italian Greyhounds!"](#).

Unfortunately, it is easy to overlook this basic grooming. Many of the dogs we take in to rescue, regardless of what their situations were before, need a nail clipping when they arrive. Similarly, I've noticed at playdates there are always a couple IGs with very long claws. Remember though, that trimming claws is not merely a cosmetic issue, but it is also a health issue. You and you IG may dread biweekly trims, but it is one of the most basic things you can do to take stress off your pups' joints as they age.