



Everyday tasks can seriously mess up your manicure.

MANI MAINTENANCE

A SHOW OF HANDS

No one apologizes for messy hair, but chipped or unpolished nails? Unforgivable! Luckily, there are new ways to go bare while avoiding manicure shame

By NING CHAO

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'M SO EMBARRASSED,' apologizes my friend Meg as she sits down at the table. “Don’t look at my hands,” she pleads, curling her fingers into guilty little fists in her lap. “I can’t believe I’m meeting you for lunch... without a manicure.” Wait. That’s it? I was

expecting some shocking confession, or juicy gossip at the very least. Since when did bare nails become taboo? Later, glancing around the subway on my way home, I do a quick survey. Sure enough, most women are wearing some sort of polish, whether it’s a glossy gel manicure or the chipped remnants of two-month-old color.

Although it’s perfectly socially acceptable to throw your hair into a messy bun for work or even for a black-tie gala these days, it’s hard to get away with ignored nails. “When you see a woman with lipstick and mascara on, you think, *She looks sharp,*” explains CND cofounder Jan Arnold, whose Shellac manicure helped ignite the gel trend. “But if her nails are bare, the brakes screech. She looks unfinished—like she’s decked to the nines and forgot her shoes.” Chipped polish is even worse, looking more unprofessional than none at all. Whether you choose a pale green (like Mint Candy Apple, Essie’s best-selling shade last year) or a sheer nude—which is making a comeback if the fall shows for Céline, Lanvin, and Saint Laurent are any indication—maintenance is of the utmost importance.

IN THE BUFF

“Beautiful almond-shaped nails can look very chic without polish,” says celebrity manicurist Deborah Lippmann. She suggests shaping nails to softly rounded tips and using a fabric buffer, like the one on her Smooth Operator 4-Way Nail Buffer, to maintain shine a few watts subtler than clear polish. “Buffing exfoliates the nail to make it look smooth—it’s an elegant way of doing no polish,” she says.

And don’t forget the rest of your hands; cuticle grooming and moisturizing are paramount when there’s no color to distract the eye. “When your nails are bare, your cuticles had better be absolutely perfect,” Arnold says. She recommends applying a cuticle remover with exfoliating acids (CND’s Cuticle Eraser contains lactic and glycolic acids) every day, and then gently pushing back cuticles with a

BARELY THERE

THE LATEST MUST-HAVES FOR LOOKING POLISHED



1. **Kent** NB1 Satin Wood Nail Brush, \$29.
2. **Sally Hansen** Miracle Gel in Bare Dare (Miracle Gel Top Coat sold separately), available in August, \$10.
3. **Deborah Lippmann** Smooth Operator 4-Way Nail Buffer, \$12.
4. **Lauren B. Beauty** Nourishing Hand Crème, \$24.
5. **CND** SolarOil, \$11.
6. **Labnails** The Buffy 3-in-1 Electric Mani Pen Kit, \$40.
7. **Orly** BB Crème, \$15.

warm, wet washcloth in the shower or bath. Keep a bottle of cuticle oil on your desk and reapply at least once a day.

HAND “LINGERIE”

While giving nails a breather from color seems not just trendy, but also healthy, polish may actually be better for nails than leaving them au naturel, says nail disorder specialist Dr. Richard Scher, a professor of clinical dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College. “Nail cells expand when they’re wet and shrink when dry, a process that weakens them over time and can lead to breakage if you wash your hands often,” he explains. “Polish protects against this damage by sealing out the elements.”

If you don’t want to commit to the upkeep of color, nail treatments are a flattering bridge between naked and varnished. Essie Fill the Gap goes on like polish but is about as close to actual lacquer as a facial mask is to foundation. Packed with bamboo extract and keratin, it hides split and peeling beds and dries almost instantaneously to a natural-looking, matte finish. Another option is Orly’s new BB Crème, which blurs imperfections, spackles the nail surface, and lends a sheer tint that looks great on its own.

STRIPPING DOWN

But what if a gel manicure is standing in the way of you and nude-looking nails? Designed to last for weeks (that’s why we love them), gels are notoriously difficult and destructive to remove. “Soaking them off in acetone dehydrates the heck out of your hands and nails,” Scher warns. And that’s if you’re patient enough to soak at all. “Ripping gels off with the teeth is a very common way of removing these manicures at home—I see it often,” Lippmann admits. Even though it may be drying, removing gels with acetone is a lot healthier than picking (or biting!), which may peel off layers of healthy nail in the process. Lippmann suggests soaking for 10 to 15 minutes, then using a gentle nail buffer to remove what’s loose. Resoak and repeat the process if necessary.

And make a note for when you’re ready to return to color: Soak-free gels like Deborah Lippmann Gel Lab and Dior Vernis Gel Shine and Long Wear Nail Lacquer can be easily removed with acetone and a cotton ball, while Sally Hansen’s new Miracle Gel lasts up to 14 days and comes off with a non-acetone remover. Bottom line: “If you’re going to wear traditional gels, you must pre-commit to taking them off properly, or it will take six months for your nails to grow out again,” says Lippmann. That’s half a year of manicure shame. **mc**

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