

Athlete's Foot

Information Sheet

Athlete's Foot (Tinea) is a fungal skin infection that develops on the bottom of the feet and between the toes. It can become itchy and uncomfortable. Many people will experience Athlete's Foot at least once in their lifetime as it is easily spread through sharing common surfaces.

Athlete's Foot is medically referred to as tinea pedis. It is coined 'Athlete's Foot' due to its high prevalence among athletes, although anyone is able to contract the infection.

What are the symptoms of Athlete's Foot?

If you have contracted Athlete's Foot, you may experience some or all of the following:

- Itching, especially after removing your shoes and socks
- Red, scaly and 'peeling' patches on the skin
- Dry and/or blister-like appearance
- White, macerated appearance between the toes
- Breakdown of the skin between the toes that may cause cracks or fissures
- Stinging or burning

Your symptoms will likely be unilateral and may affect one or both feet. If your feet are also particularly odorous, you may have both a fungal and bacterial infection simultaneously. If so, your required treatment will differ from a fungal infection alone and you will need to see your primary physician.

What causes Athlete's Foot?

A fungus (specifically the Trichophyton and Epidermophyton strains) is the cause of Athlete's Foot and is contracted through direct contact with the fungus. This can be through an infected person or from contact with contaminated floors and other surfaces (e.g. towels).

When the fungus is paired with warm and damp conditions, including sweat, it can grow quickly and spread. This is why the athlete's foot is often contracted from:

- Shower floors
- Changing rooms
- Gyms
- Closed-in shoes

Be careful, your toenails are also vulnerable to fungal nail infections. These are often difficult to treat, even in drier and cooler conditions.

Managing Athlete's Foot at home

As warm, damp conditions encourage the growth of the infection, maintaining a dry and cool environment for your feet will help control the infection and prevent it from worsening. You can:

- Dry your feet well after showering and physical activity, ensuring to dry between the toes with your towel. Don't share your towel with others in your household to reduce the risk of spreading the infection
- Use an antifungal spray, powder or cream, available to purchase from the pharmacy. Be sure to use as instructed and maintain the appropriate frequency of use
- Air your feet as much as possible, opting for open footwear over enclosed shoes when possible
- Let your enclosed shoes dry well by airing them out after use

- **Use absorbent powder** on your feet daily to help keep them dry. Anti-fungal powders are available from pharmacies
- **Wear socks** that draw moisture away from the skin when you need to wear socks. Wool or "dry fit" sports socks are good examples

To reduce your risk of contracting an infection, always protect your feet with shoes in communal areas like public showers, gyms, changing rooms and pools. Avoid sharing towels, socks and footwear with those that have an existing infection.

When to see a podiatrist & how they can help

If the home-care methods do not relieve your Athlete's Foot or you find yourself with reoccurring infections even after following the above advices, see your Podiatrist.

They will help with:

- Confirming the diagnosis of Athlete's Foot over other conditions with similar presentations, such as eczema, dermatitis, psoriasis, bacterial infections, mould infections and more. This may include referring for fungal microscopy and culture
- Diagnosing any other concurrent conditions, e.g. fungal nail infection, and treating accordingly
- Recommending the right antifungal products for you to use
- Addressing any problems that may have developed as a result of your Athlete's Foot, e.g. cracks in the skin
- Helping you with additional homecare tips specific to you to both manage your current infection and reduce the likelihood of future reinfection
- Refer you for oral antifungal medication if the infection continues to be unresponsive to traditional treatments

Disclaimer: This document is an informative guide only and is not a tool for diagnosis. If you suspect that you may have Athlete's Foot, we recommend that you see your Podiatrist for their professional opinion, accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment. Referrals are not required to see your Podiatrist.