



DERMATOLOGY
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DID YOU KNOW?

Myth: Only people with poor hygiene get athlete's foot.

Athlete's foot has nothing to do with cleanliness. Even if you wash your feet with soap and water several times a day, you can get athlete's foot – especially if you don't dry your feet completely after each washing.



Myth: Athlete's foot will clear up on its own.

Without treatment, athlete's foot will make your feet even itchier and more miserable. It can also turn into a more serious infection.



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ATHLETE'S FOOT (TINEA PEDIS)

Athlete's foot, also known as tinea pedis, is an infection of the feet caused by fungus. The infection can range from mild to severe and may last a short or long time. The infection can persist or recur, but generally responds well to treatment. In some cases, long-term medication and preventive measures may be needed.

Athlete's foot occurs when a particular type of fungus grows and multiplies in your feet (especially between your toes) or, less commonly, your hands. It thrives in warm humid conditions and may occur at the same time as other fungal skin infections such as ringworm or jock itch.

Athlete's foot is contagious and can be passed through direct contact or contact with items such as shoes, stockings, and shower or pool surfaces.

SYMPTOMS

The most common symptom is cracked, flaking, peeling skin between the toes. The affected area is usually red and itchy. You may feel burning or stinging, and there may be blisters, oozing, or crusting. In addition to the toes, the symptoms can also occur on the heels, palms, and between the fingers. If the fungus spreads to your nails, they can become discolored, thick, and even crumble.

TESTS & DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is based primarily on the appearance of your skin. If tests are performed, they may include:

- Skin culture (fungi from flecks of skin are able to grow in the lab)
- Skin lesion biopsy (examination may show fungus under the microscope)
- Skin lesion KOH exam (skin scrapings show fungus under the microscope)

TREATMENT

Over-the-counter antifungal powders or creams can help control the infection. These generally contain miconazole, clotrimazole, or tolnaftate. Continue using the medicine for 1 - 2 weeks after the infection has cleared from your feet to prevent the infection from returning. A good antifungal powder to use in your shoes is Zeasorb[®]-AF.

Severe or frequently recurring athlete's foot may require further treatment such as a stronger prescription antifungal medication. These include topical medicines such as econazole or terbinafine, and oral medications.

TIPS

Athlete's foot almost always responds well to self-care, although it may come back. To prevent future infections, follow these steps:

- Keep your feet clean and dry, especially between your toes.
- Wash your feet thoroughly with soap and water and dry the area very carefully and completely. Try to do this at least twice a day.
- Wear clean, cotton socks and change your socks and shoes as often as necessary to keep your feet dry.