



Athlete's Foot

Athlete's foot is an infection of the feet caused by fungus called *tinea pedis*. Athlete's foot may last for a short or long time and may come back after treatment.

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. 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.

The body normally hosts a variety of microorganisms, including bacteria and fungi. Some of these are useful to the body. Others may, under certain conditions, multiply rapidly and cause infections, athlete's foot being the most common. It may occur at the same time as other fungal skin infections such as ringworm or jock itch. These fungi thrive in warm, moist areas. Your risk for getting athlete's foot increases if you wear closed shoes (especially if they are plastic-lined), keep your feet wet for prolonged periods of time, sweat a lot, or develop a minor skin or nail injury.

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.

Athlete's foot almost always responds well to self-care, although it may come back. Severe, ongoing infections that don't respond to 2-4 weeks of self-care, and frequently recurring athlete's foot, may require further treatment by your foot doctor. Stronger, prescription antifungal medications may be needed. These include topical medicines, like ketoconazole or terbinafine, and pills. Antibiotics may be necessary to treat secondary bacterial infections that occur in addition to the fungus (for example, from scratching).

Call your doctor right away if your foot is swollen and warm to the touch, especially if there are red streaks. These are signs of a possible bacterial infection. Other signs include pus or other discharge and fever. Also call right away if you have diabetes and develop athlete's foot, or if athlete's foot symptoms do not go away within one month of using self-care measures.

Athlete's foot infections range from mild to severe and may last a short or long time. They may persist or recur, but they generally respond well to treatment. Long-term medication and preventive measures may be needed.

Toenail Fungus



Fungal nail infection is an infection of the nails by a fungus. It can be a result of the same mold-like fungi that cause athlete's foot, or by yeast-like fungi, called candida, that also cause diaper rash and oral thrush.

Symptoms can include brittleness, change in nail shape, crumbling of the nail, discoloration, loosening (or detachment) of the nail, loss of luster and shine, and/or a thickening of the nail.

Fungal nail infections are most often seen in adults, and often occur following a fungal foot infection. The fungi thrive in warm, moist areas - so people who frequent public swimming pools, gyms, or shower rooms- and people who perspire a great deal- are at greatest risk. As fungal nail infections are stubborn to treat, you should see a foot doctor if you experience any of the symptoms above, or if have pain, redness, or draining pus around your nails.

Your doctor will suspect a fungal infection based on the appearance of the nails. The diagnosis can be confirmed by scraping the nail for a culture, or a microscopic examination to identify the type of fungus.

Over-the-counter creams and ointments generally do not help treat this condition. Fungal nail infection is only cured by the growth of new, non-infected nails. Prescription antifungal medicines taken by mouth may help clear the fungus in about 50% of patients. However, such medicines can cause side effects or may interfere with other medications. Some of the oral medications used to treat fungal infections of the nail can harm the liver.

In some cases, your doctor may remove the nail. Nails grow slowly. Even if treatment is successful, a new, clearer nail may take up to a year to grow in.

Fungal nail infections may be difficult to treat. Even with successful treatment, it is common for the fungus to return.