

Athlete's Foot (Tinea Pedis) and Fungal Infections

Information sheet

What is it?

Athlete's foot is a fungal infection. It can lead to intense itching, and cracked, blistered or peeling areas of skin, redness and scaling. It can occur on moist, waterlogged skin especially between the fourth and fifth toes, or on dry flaky skin around the heels or elsewhere on the foot.

What causes it?

It's caused by a number of fungal species which you can pick up from anywhere (typically communal areas such as pools, showers and changing rooms) or anywhere where you may walk around barefoot. The fungus on each bit of skin that falls away from someone else's feet can be picked up by you. Once your feet have been contaminated, the warm, dark, sweaty environment of feet cramped in shoes or trainers provides the ideal breeding ground for the fungus. However, athlete's foot also occurs in dry, flaky areas.

Who gets it?

Anyone can get athlete's foot regardless of age. However, if you walk barefoot around swimming pools, gyms and changing rooms you are at more risk. Patients with reduced immunity or diabetes are also more prone to fungal foot infections.

What can I do?

Re-think your footwear

Change your footwear regularly. There is no point sorting your feet out if you constantly re-infect them by putting them into damp, fungal-infected shoes.

It takes 24-48 hours for shoes to dry out properly

Alternate your footwear daily.

To help shoes dry out more quickly, take out any insoles.

Loosen any laces and open your shoes fully so the air can circulate.

Go for trainers with ventilation holes.

If your shoes are so tight that they squeeze your toes together, this encourages moisture to gather between your toes and encourages fungus.

Tips for prevention

Let air circulate between toes by choosing a wider, deeper toe-box and choose shoes made from natural materials.

Change your socks daily and go for cotton rather than synthetic materials as this allows the feet to breathe more easily.

Wear flip-flops or sandals in the bathroom or in public showers

Never wear someone else's shoes, trainers or slippers.

Treatment

If your athlete's foot occurs on a dry area such as your heels, you need to restore moisture by rubbing in an anti-fungal cream or ointment. Do not forget to wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. You could also use disposable gloves to apply.

If your feet are moist or sweaty, the treatment required is slightly different. Wash your feet in cold water then dry them thoroughly, preferably with a separate towel or even kitchen roll. Pat them dry rather than rubbing as rubbing tends to take away part of the healing skin. The aim is to get rid of any moisture.

Avoid powders, as they tend to clog up and irritate the skin. A spirit-based preparation can help, such as surgical spirit. It also cools and soothes the skin and is an antiseptic.

If you have mild athlete's foot, re-thinking your foot hygiene by following the 'Tips for prevention' may help. If an anti-fungal medication is required, the podiatrist or pharmacist will be able to recommend one.

Contact us

Oxleas Adults' Community Greenwich Podiatry Service

0208 320 3550

Monday – Friday

8:30am – 4:30pm

It is not always possible for us to answer the phone straight away. Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

Please let us know if you require an interpreter or have any additional needs.