

Athlete's Foot - Patient Information

What is athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot is a fungal skin infection usually caused by one of two organisms: *Trichophyton rubrum* or *Trichophyton interdigitale*. You may also hear these organisms referred to as dermatophytes. The scientific term for athlete's foot is tinea pedis.

What are the symptoms of athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot causes scaling of the skin in between the toes. It usually causes itching (sometimes severe) and it can be painful. The fungi that cause athlete's foot can be found on floors and in clothing, especially socks and shoes. The fungi can be spread from person to person by contact with an infected area but will only grow in warm, moist areas. Keeping feet clean and dry will prevent fungi from growing. If the skin between the toes actually breaks, bacteria can cause a secondary infection in the area. This is more likely to occur in people with diabetes, those with impaired immune systems, or the elderly. If a bacterial infection occurs, there will be redness and swelling. If this happens you should make an appointment to see your doctor as antibiotic treatment may be necessary.

How is athlete's foot treated?

Athlete's foot is usually treated with antifungal creams, powders or sprays that can be obtained by prescription or purchased over the counter. Treatment is usually continued for up to four weeks although the infection may seem to have disappeared before this.

Self-help measures

- Keep your feet clean and dry to prevent recurrence of athlete's foot. Medicated foot powders may help.
- Wear shoes made of breathable fabric such as canvas or leather. Vinyl can cause feet to remain moist encouraging fungi to breed.
- Wear cotton socks rather than socks made of nylon or other synthetic materials because their absorbency helps feet to remain dry.
- Wear flip-flops in locker rooms and public showers to prevent contracting athlete's foot.