

Athlete's foot needs our attention

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Athlete's foot or tinea pedis

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By Dr Brighton Chireka

Athlete's foot is a rash caused by a fungus that usually appears between the toes. In athlete's foot the skin may be itchy , red, scaly , dry , cracked or blistered. Athlete's feet is called tinea pedis medically and is usually not serious. Having said that it should be treated as it can cause smelly feet and can spread to other parts of the body or other people. Around 15 to 25 % of people are likely to have athlete's foot

Signs and symptoms of athlete's foot

Athlete's foot most commonly affects the skin between the toes or on the bottom of the feet. Affected skin may be dry , red , scaly and flaky. The skin may also be white, doggy and cracked. It may be itchy , sore and at times covered in blisters.

The fungal infection can spread around the feet and toenails. Scratching the infected skin and then touching other body parts can also spread the infection. In severe cases, skin damaged by athlete's foot can become infected with bacteria. This can lead to cellulitis, which causes the skin to become red, hot and swollen.

How do we then get athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot is caused by fungi growing and multiplying on the skin. The fungi that cause the infection thrive in warm, dark and moist places like feet.

You're more likely to get athlete's foot if you:

- 1- Don not keep your feet clean and dry
- 2- Wear shoes that cause your feet to get hot and sweaty
- 3- Walk around barefoot in places where fungal infections can spread easily, such as communal showers, locker rooms and gyms
- 4- share towels, socks and shoes with other people
- 5- Have a weakened immune system such if you have cancer , HIV or taking steroids or medication that reduces your immunity.
- 6- Have certain other health conditions, such as diabetes

Please remember that athlete's foot can easily spread to other people by touching infected skin or coming into contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

How can you prevent athlete's foot

You can reduce your risk of developing athlete's foot by:

- 1-drying your feet gently but thoroughly after washing them, particularly the areas between your toes
- 2-wearing cotton socks and roomy shoes made of natural materials such as leather – this can allow

your feet to "breathe"

3-wear a fresh pair of socks, tights or stockings every day

4-change your shoes every couple of days – this allows them to dry out between uses

5-not walking around barefoot in public showers and locker rooms

not sharing towels, socks and shoes with other people, and ensuring your towels are washed regularly

6-using talcum powder on your feet to stop them getting sweaty

7-not using moisturiser between your toes, as this can help fungi multiply

If you or your child develops athlete's foot, there's no need to stay off work or school. Follow the advice above to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to others.

How can you reduce infecting others?

-avoid scratching affected skin , as this may spread infection to other sites

-avoid going barefooted in public places (you can wear protective footwear such as flip-flops

-do not share towels and wash them frequently

-there is no need to keep children away from school

-you do not need to wait for a doctor , you can go to the chemist and get some cream without prescription.

Treatments for athlete's foot

Athlete's foot is unlikely to get better on its own. It can usually be treated using antifungal treatments available from pharmacies without needing to see a doctor.

Antifungal treatments work by stopping the fungus causing your athlete's foot from growing. They come in creams, sprays, liquids and powders. Some of the recommended medications are ketoconazole cream , terbinafine cream . A short course of a steroid cream may be added if the inflammation is too much .

If the creams fail or the infection is severe , oral antifungal are used. These include terbinafine , griseofulvin or itraconazole .

Flu console is not recommended as it is not effective . Ketoconazole is not recommended as there is high risk of liver damage.

Also do not us tea tree oil as it is not effective .

This article was compiled by Dr Brighton Chireka who is a GP and a Health Commissioner in South Kent Coast in the United Kingdom. You can contact him at: info@docbeecee.co.uk and can read more of his work on his blog at [DR CHIREKA'S BLOG](#)

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