

WHAT IS ATHLETE'S FOOT?

Athlete's foot is a common skin infection that, as the name suggests, presents in the foot. However, you certainly don't need to be an athlete to get it, and untreated it can spread to other areas of the body.

It is a fungal infection that typically leads to red and scaly skin around the sides and underneath the foot, which often peels or becomes cracked.

It can also occur between the toes, particularly where there is excess moisture, and this is often characterized by a white, rubbery appearance. It is usually intensely itchy and can lead to secondary lesions caused by scratching.

HOW DID I GET IT?

Fungal spores are highly contagious and can be transferred from person to person via surfaces that are in contact with bare feet, such as communal changing rooms or around swimming pools.

Your skin normally acts as barrier to external organisms - if your skin is very dry or cracked you may be presenting a portal of entry for the fungal spores to invade and thus be more prone to infection.

HOW DO I GET RID OF IT?

Unlike fungal nail infections, Athlete's foot responds well to topical treatments and there are a number of over-the-counter creams available which your podiatrist or pharmacist can recommend.

It is better to treat the symptoms early to avoid the infection spreading into your toenails or other areas of your body, or from inadvertently passing it on to other people.

The perfect environments for fungal organisms are places where it is warm, humid and dark – just like inside a shoe! Change hosiery daily and try to rotate your footwear to allow them time to dry out, particularly if the weather is warm or your feet are prone to sweating.

By allowing shoes to dry will help prevent the spores from lying dormant in damp footwear and maintaining the potential to re-infect you.

It is important not to stop your treatment too soon - continue applying the cream in accordance with the medicine guidelines to avoid the infection recurring.

HOW DO I AVOID CATCHING IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Fungal infections can infect both dry and damp skin. If your skin is dry use a moisturiser to avoid cracking and to maintain an intact skin barrier.

If you have moist skin, such as between the toes, ensure your footwear is breathable, that you dry thoroughly (but gently) after washing, and use some surgical spirit that helps the skin to dry out.

Follow the footwear and hosiery hygiene advice given above, and wear beach shoes or flip-flops when in communal areas such as changing rooms.

If someone you live with suffers from Athlete's Foot then it is important that all concerned adopt good hygiene practices to reduce the risk of spreading the infection around.

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.