



Suffolk Podiatry

Athlete's Foot (fungal skin infections)

Athlete's foot is a common condition caused by a contagious fungal infection of the skin (Tinea Pedis).

Fungal skin infections can occur on any area of the body but prefer warm, dark, damp environments. This makes feet an ideal location for them to thrive, especially the areas between the toes.

How do you get a fungal skin infection?

People catch fungal infections by contact with the spores that the fungus produces. You are more likely to be exposed to tinea pedis spores in warm damp environments, such as changing rooms, showers and bathrooms as it thrives in these conditions.

You may also be more susceptible if you have warm sweaty feet (making teenagers prime targets for fungal foot infections), but also if you have a weakened immune system, or have a condition like diabetes.

Symptoms

Fungal infections can present in a variety of different ways. These are some of the common signs and symptoms, although some cases of Athlete's Foot may be harder to see depending on skin colour:

- Redness between the toes.
 - Itching between the toes.
 - Blistering of the skin underneath the toes.
 - Splitting/peeling of the skin between the toes.
 - In severe cases the splitting can be severe enough to cause bleeding.
 - Sometimes the infection is present in other areas of the foot e.g. around the heel.
- Areas of dryness, redness or peeling may indicate a fungal infection of the skin.

Prevention

Athlete's foot can be easy to prevent:

- Wash your feet daily and dry them thoroughly, especially the areas between the toes.
- Wear cotton socks which allow the skin to breathe.
- Change socks and hosiery daily.
- Avoid sharing towels, socks, or shoes.
- Wash socks and hosiery at high temperatures.
- Wear shoes which allow your feet to breathe. Leather shoes are usually better than those made with man-made materials.
- Avoid wearing the same shoes every day.
- Wear flipflops in damp communal areas or anywhere that other people go barefoot (although be mindful that flip-flops are not ideal for general walking).
- If shoes/trainers become damp through sweat, rain etc. ensure that they are allowed to dry out thoroughly before re-wearing.
- Use anti-fungal sprays (such as terbinafine) inside your shoes every month. Anti-fungal powders can irritate the skin.

Treatment

Suffolk podiatry is unable to treat Athlete's Foot. Ask your pharmacist about topical treatment that can be purchased over the counter. These can come in different forms as:

- Creams
- Sprays
- Lotions
- Powders (some people find that powder can clump and irritate the skin)

It is important to follow the instructions provided, and (where relevant) to treat for several weeks beyond the disappearance of the symptoms.

Anti-fungal tablets are also available but these have side effects and will only be prescribed by your GP for more serious cases.

When to seek help

Unless you have a high-risk medical condition most patients with fungal skin infections do not require NHS care and should follow the self-care advice outlined above.

High-street Pharmacist or GP?

If the pharmacist is unable to advise you on treatments available due to underlying health issues it may be necessary to contact your GP.

You should also consider seeking advice from your GP if:

- Over the counter treatments are not working.
- You are in a lot of discomfort.
- The infection spreads to other parts of your body such as your hands.
- You have a weakened immune system – for example, you have had an organ transplant or are having chemotherapy.
- If your foot or leg is hot, painful, swollen and red (the redness may be less noticeable on darker skin tones) – this could be a more serious infection. You should seek advice urgently at your GP practice.

You should continue to follow the self-care advice to prevent further spread or worsening symptoms.

Private Podiatrist

Private Podiatrists may also be able to diagnose and advise on fungal skin infections.

Ensure that any Podiatrist you visit is registered with the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council). You can check their membership details by going to <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/check>

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