
Athlete's Foot Fungus

What Causes Athlete's Foot?

Tinea pedis is the medical name for athlete's foot fungus. This organism prefers warm, moist skin; this is why the infection commonly occurs in the folds between the toes and is often worse in warm weather. Not all skin rashes on the foot are due to fungus. Eczema can appear very similar to a fungal infection .

This fungus may stay in the skin indefinitely. Even if the rash seems to have been cured, microscopic examination may reveal the fungus to be present. While medicines will clear the rash, the fungus may be dormant only to cause a recurrence several months later.

Should it be treated?

Sometimes a fungal infection will cause cracking between the toes which then allows the secondary invasion by bacteria. These bacteria can cause an infection of the skin called cellulitis that can be very serious and even life-threatening. For this reason, it is best to keep athlete's foot infection under control with intermittent therapy.

Is it contagious?

It is possible. However, special precautions at home are unnecessary, since there is no way your family can avoid exposure to the fungus at swimming pools and locker rooms. In our society, everyone is exposed to the fungus that causes athlete's foot. Why some people get the infection, while others are resistant probably has to do more with their immune system and its ability to kill the fungus.

Treatment

Over-the-counter antifungal creams like Tinactin cream are effective. In warm weather, use of a foot powder to absorb perspiration is advisable and wearing sandals for air circulation may also be of benefit.

If your foot fungus has spread up your leg or you also suffer from "jock-itch", an oral antifungal prescription, GrisPeg, may be prescribed. This will require blood tests before you start the medication and after you finish the drug to check liver function. Since this drug is metabolized by your liver, you will want to avoid alcohol and other drugs which can damage the liver. Treatment with this drug usually lasts one to two months.

Toenail infections are very difficult to treat and require months of therapy with oral antifungal drugs. It usually is not worth the risk to your health to treat these infections. Occasionally such a toenail will partially break off or grow so thick that it has to be surgically removed. This is performed in the dermatologist's office under local anesthesia. Removal is relatively painless and there is minimal pain afterward. The nail sometimes will grow out normally after it is removed.