

Fungal Infections - Athlete's Foot and Toenail Infections

Athlete's foot (Tinea pedis)

It's estimated that one in six people in the UK currently have athlete's foot. It is caused by a fungus that makes your skin itchy, flaky and red, occasionally blisters, and causes white cracks to appear, especially between your toes and on the side of your foot. It is often picked up from walking bare foot on damp, contaminated floors such as in communal changing rooms. If you don't wash your hands after touching a contaminated area, it can spread to other parts of your body, including your groin and underarms.



Toenail infections (Tinea unguium)

These can occur on any part of your nail and take a long time to develop. They cause your nail to discolor, become crumbly or thicken. Your toenails may change color or become thick, misshapen, and brittle. Normally the nail will be discolored with a yellow or brown mark, or it may appear as white flecks on the nail. Quite often the infection will start at the tip of the nail, usually to one side, but it may spread to affect the whole nail plate, and may even spread to other nails. Sometimes the surrounding skin and nail bed may become inflamed and irritated, but quite often there is no pain involved. The nails may also become smelly. It is most common in people who already have athlete's foot as this infection can penetrate the nails.



How do I treat it?

For athlete's foot anti-fungal creams, sprays and powders can be bought from a Pharmacist, and should be applied as recommended. If the problem does not go away your GP may prescribe something more suitable. Typically, sprays are to be used between the toes on moist areas, creams are to be used on the soles on dry patches, and powders are to be used to disinfect hosiery and footwear.

For fungal nails, you can discuss symptoms with your local Pharmacist. They may recommend an over the counter treatment or recommend that you may need to see your Doctor. Because there

are several toenail problems that resemble fungal nail infection, your Doctor may send clippings of your toenail away to a lab to be examined in order to make a definite diagnosis. There are several preparations available that your doctor may prescribe. These come in the form of either a lacquer that is painted over the nail, or in a tablet form.

Hygiene

- Fungal infections are contagious and can be spread to others, so it is essential that you do not walk barefoot
- Keep the feet clean by bathing daily, and drying well. Do not share your towels with others.
- Use tissues to dry the infected area. They can then be disposed of.
- Apply clean hosiery daily, and allow shoes to air well between wearing
- Wear suitable shoes, such as flip-flops in communal areas to prevent spreading or catching the infection
- Alternate footwear on a daily basis, this allows shoes to dry out, reducing moisture on the foot
- Apply clean hosiery daily. Avoid nylon or man-made fibres as these causes the feet to become hot.
- Sweaty feet can be improved by dabbing surgical spirits onto the feet after bathing and drying.

Podiatry Service. Referral and Booking Management Centre, Bensham Hospital, Gateshead NE8 4YL. 0191 4458401.

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website (<https://www.qegateshead.nhs.uk/fairprocessing>) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request

No IL794 Version: 1 First Published: 11/2020 Review Date: 11/2022 Author: Alicia Rutterford