



## Leaflet: Athlete's Foot (Tinea Pedis)

# Athlete's Foot (Tinea Pedis)

Athlete's foot is a skin infection caused by a fungus germ. It is very common. About 1 in 10 people in the UK are thought to have athlete's foot at any given time. Some types of fungus germs (fungi) like to live in human skin. If conditions are right they can 'invade' the skin, multiply and cause infection. The conditions fungi like best are warm, moist and airless areas of skin such as between the toes. Athlete's foot can also be passed on from person to person. For example, this may occur in communal showers that athletes or swimmers use where many people wash. If a tiny flake of infected skin from a person with athlete's foot falls off whilst washing it may be trodden on by others who may then develop the infection. Once a small patch of infection develops it typically spreads along the skin.

## What are the symptoms of athlete's foot?

The skin between the toes (usually the little toes) tends to be affected at first. A rash develops that becomes itchy and scaly. The skin may become cracked and sore. Tiny flakes of infected skin may fall off. The rash may spread gradually along the toes if left untreated.

## Is athlete's foot serious?

Usually not: most people treat their itchy toes before it spreads much. Sometimes the infection spreads to the skin on other parts of the body. Fungi do not usually go deeper than the skin into the body. However, other germs (bacteria) may come through the cracked skin of untreated athlete's foot and occasionally cause more serious infections of the foot or leg.

## What is the treatment for athlete's foot?

An anti-fungal cream available from pharmacies or on prescription usually clears athlete's foot within 2-3 weeks. To make sure all the fungi are cleared it is usual to apply the cream to the surrounding 4-6 cm of normal skin in addition to the rash. Also, it is usual to continue with the cream for a week or so after the rash has gone. An anti-fungal medicine is sometimes prescribed if the rash does not clear with a cream or for widespread fungal rashes.

## The following tips may prevent athlete's foot recurring

- ◆ Wash feet and toes daily.
- ◆ Dry the skin between the toes thoroughly after washing. This is perhaps the most important point. It is tempting to put on socks when the feet are not quite dry. The soggy skin between the toes is then ideal for fungi to grow.
- ◆ Do not share towels in communal changing rooms.
- ◆ Change socks daily. Fungi may multiply in flakes of skin in unwashed socks. Cotton socks and leather footwear are better than nylon socks and plastic footwear that increase sweating.
- ◆ It is ideal to leave shoes and socks off as much as possible but this may not be practical.

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