

Athlete's Foot

What is athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot is a common skin problem caused by a fungus. Usually beginning on the skin between the toes, the fungus infection becomes scaly and itchy. Over time it may cause a break in the skin and become sore. Another term for athlete's foot is tinea pedis.

How does it occur?

The fungus that causes athlete's foot is everywhere in the environment. It is commonly picked up from the floors of showers, locker rooms, and exercise facilities. The fungus is more likely to grow on sweaty, constantly wet, or improperly dried feet (especially in shoes or socks with poor ventilation).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- itching
- cracking and peeling skin, usually between the last two toes
- soreness
- blisters (occasionally).

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider can usually diagnose athlete's foot after examining your skin. Sometimes he or she may swab or scrape off a skin sample to test for fungus. If your provider suspects that you may

also have a bacterial infection, the skin sample may be tested for bacteria.

How is it treated?

The infection may clear up without treatment, but most fungal infections are treated with medicine put on the skin. If the infection is severe or widespread, your provider may prescribe a medication to take by mouth.

How long will the effects last?

The acute stage of the infection usually lasts 1 to 10 days. Chronic infection may persist for months or years. If a severe case of athlete's foot is not treated, it may develop into a serious bacterial infection. The infection may eventually affect the toenails, which are harder to treat.

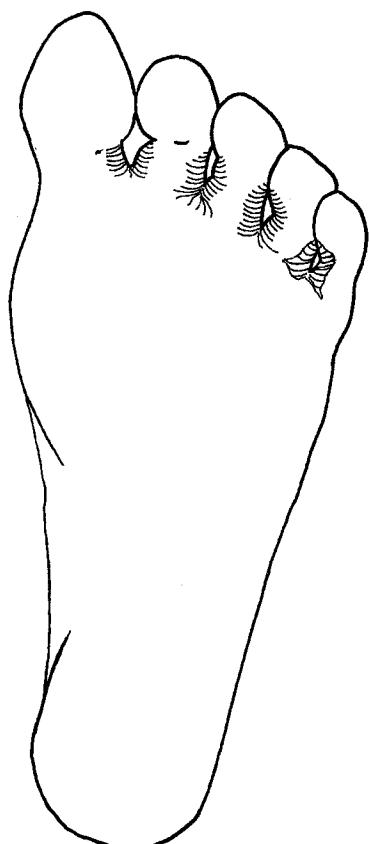
How can I help prevent athlete's foot?

Follow these guidelines:

- Wear cotton socks when you exercise.
- Change your socks every day.
- Wear sandals or shoes with ventilation holes or porous upper material (a natural material such as canvas or leather rather than man-made material).

- Air out your shoes when you aren't wearing them.
- Wear thongs or sandals when you take a shower in a locker room.
- Dry your feet very well, especially between the toes.
- Apply an antifungal powder on the affected area.
- Disinfect shower and locker room floors.

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Athlete's foot most often affects the areas between the toes