

Welcome to the: Orthopaedic Opinion Online Website

The website for the answer to all your Orthopaedic Questions

- **Orthopaedic Opinion Online** is a website designed to provide information to patients who have orthopaedic and musculoskeletal problems and are undergoing treatment.
- **Patient information** is provided in the form of downloadable information sheets.
- **Orthopaedic advice** and second opinions can be provided by our expert internationally renowned Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeons.
- **Online review** of patients' X rays or MRI scans can also be provided and any proposed treatment plans reviewed.
- **Book a clinical consultation** with one of our internationally renowned consultant orthopaedic surgeons in Bristol or London.
- **Orthopaedic reports** can be provided for Injury or Accident Claims and Medical Negligence claims.

This Patient Information Sheet is provided by Orthopaedic Opinion Online

Athlete's Foot

Introduction

Athlete's foot is an itchy scaly condition which affects primarily the inter-digital cleft between the toes of the feet. It is caused by a fungal infection. It can lead to intense itching, cracked, blistered or peeling areas of skin, redness and scaling. It commonly occurs on moist, waterlogged skin especially between the fourth and fifth toes, or on dry, flaky skin around the heels or elsewhere on the foot.

Fungal infection

Athletes foot is caused by a number of fungal species which are picked up on the foot by contact with infected surfaces. The places where contamination commonly occurs is typically from communal areas such as swimming pools, showers and changing rooms. The contamination is often carried in sports shoes or socks.

Once your feet have been contaminated, the warm, moist and sweaty environment of feet cramped in shoes or trainers provides the ideal breeding ground for the fungus. Thus it is a common occurrence in the feet of athletes regularly training and showering in communal places. However, athlete's foot also occurs in dry, flaky areas. It's quite common in summer sandal-wearers. The sun makes your skin dry out, so it loses its natural protective oils; this combined with the constant trauma from sandals makes them more prone to infection. Infection can also occur in many non-sporting people.

Treatment

The infections are highly contagious and can spread to anywhere on your skin. Other sites include the groin, hands and scalp. If left untreated, the fungus can spread to the toe nails, causing thickening and yellowing of the nail, which is much harder to treat.

There are many things you can do to avoid contamination and infection.

Footcare

Firstly regularly wash and thoroughly dry your feet, especially between the toes. Use of talcum powder or antifungal powder can help keep the local area dry. Change your socks daily and wear a clean pair for each exercise session. Change your footwear on a regular basis. There's no point sorting your feet out if you constantly re-infect them by putting them into damp, fungally infected socks or shoes. It takes 24-48 hours for shoes to dry out properly, so alternate your shoes. Dry your shoes out before wearing them again. A hairdryer can help. Taking the insoles out helps the shoes to dry. Also, loosen any laces and open your shoes out fully so that air can circulate. Use of trainers with ventilation holes is also of benefit.

If your shoes are so tight that they squeeze your toes together, this encourages moisture to gather between your toes and encourages fungus. Let air circulate between the toes by going for a wider, deeper toe-box instead and choose shoes made from ventilated materials.

Wear flip-flops in the bathroom and in public showers. This will not only ensure that you don't leave your dead skin around for others to pick up, but will stop you picking up another species of fungus! Avoid wearing anyone else's shoes, trainers or slippers.

Medical treatment

The treatment may vary to a small degree depending on the particular characteristics of the individual infection.

If the infected area is moist and itchy; The treatment should include washing your feet regularly and dry them thoroughly. Avoid rubbing the feet dry as rubbing tends to take away any healing skin. If your athlete's foot is mild or you've only just started to suffer, rethinking your foot hygiene may help. Surgical spirit is sometimes advised to dry and disinfect the area between the toes. Alternately a proprietary powder preparation or cream from a chemist may help. Once the condition settles treatment and foot care should be continued. Often the contamination remains and the natural skin defences are weak so that re-infection is common. Anti-fungal powder is also good for dusting inside shoes and trainers.

If your athlete's foot occurs on a dry area such as your heel, you need to restore moisture by rubbing in an anti-fungal cream or ointment.

If the condition does not settle after a few days of treatment advice should be sought. This may be advice about anti-fungal cream or powder from your pharmacist. Alternately this may be advice from a podiatrist or chiropodist or indeed from your General Practitioner. Specialist advice from a dermatologist is rarely required.

Other treatments and medications

Infections which extend over time to include the nail or the nail bed may require further treatment. This can usually be obtained from a podiatrist or chiropodist. Where the fungal infection has spread to your nails, by reducing the thickness or cutting back the nails, may expose the infected skin below to topical treatments. Infected nails themselves do not respond to topical treatment and oral medication or tablets from your general practitioner is often required.

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