

# Athlete's Foot

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## KEY POINTS

- Athlete's foot is a common skin problem caused by a fungus. The fungal infection usually begins on the skin between the toes.
  - Treatment may include antifungal powder, spray, or cream available at a drugstore. In some cases, your healthcare provider may give you a prescription for antifungal medicine.
  - Keep your feet clean and dry, especially in hot weather. Dry your feet well after bathing, especially between your toes. Wear cotton or athletic socks.
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## What is athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot is a common skin problem caused by a fungus. The fungal infection usually begins on the skin between the toes. Over time, it may cause a break in the skin and become sore or infected. The medical term for athlete's foot is tinea pedis.

## What is the cause?

The fungus that causes athlete's foot usually is picked up from the floors of showers, locker rooms, and exercise facilities. Fungus grows best on warm, damp skin, especially on the feet when shoes or socks don't allow air to reach the skin.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Itching or burning
- Scaly, cracked and peeling skin, usually between toes, though it may be on other parts of the foot
- Soreness in the areas with a rash, which can make walking uncomfortable or painful

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Sometimes your provider may swab or scrape off a skin sample to test for a fungal infection.

## How is it treated?

Athlete's foot can often be treated with a nonprescription antifungal powder, spray, or cream available at a drugstore. In some cases, your healthcare provider may give you a prescription for antifungal medicine that you put on the skin of your foot. If the

infection is severe or widespread, your healthcare provider may prescribe an antifungal medicine to take by mouth.

Sometimes the area of skin can also be infected with bacteria. This is more likely to happen if you scratch the area or the skin breaks open. If you have a bacterial infection, your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotic medicine.

Some people have mild athlete's foot infections just once in a while. These infections usually clear up in a few days. More serious infections may take 1 to 2 weeks. Other people have infections often or nearly constantly for weeks, months, or years. If you have frequent or long-lasting problems, see your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine that not only treats the discomfort but also helps prevent a more serious infection.

Athlete's foot is more common and may be harder to treat in people who have diabetes or poor circulation, and in people whose immune systems are weakened by HIV, cancer, or other health problems.

### **How can I help prevent athlete's foot?**

- Keep your feet clean and dry, especially in hot weather. Dry your feet well after bathing, especially between your toes.
- Wear cotton or athletic socks made with materials that wick moisture away from your foot.
- Change your socks every day, or more often if the socks become damp.
- Wear sandals or shoes that let your feet breathe. This means avoiding rubber or plastic shoes unless they have openings. Canvas or leather shoes are usually a better choice.
- Air out your shoes when you aren't wearing them. It is helpful to have more than 1 pair of everyday shoes and to switch shoes every day.
- Wear something on your feet, such as flip-flop sandals, when you take a shower in a locker room or other shared shower stall, including at home if someone else in the home has athlete's feet.
- Use talcum powder to help keep your feet dry. If this does not help, you can use antifungal powders once a week or once a month on your feet and in your shoes to help prevent repeat infection.
- Disinfect shower and locker room floors.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

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**Tinea pedis  
(fungal infection)**

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