

# Athlete's Foot

Athlete's foot (*Tinea pedis*) is a fungal skin disease usually begins in between the toes. The fungus most commonly attacks the feet because shoes create a warm, dark, and humid environment which encourages fungal growth. The warmth and dampness of areas around swimming pools, showers, and locker rooms are also breeding grounds for fungi. Because the infection was common among athletes who used these facilities frequently, the term "athlete's foot" became popular.

## **Symptoms**

Signs of athlete's foot involve dry skin, itching, scaling, inflammation, and blistering. They may occur singularly or in combination. Blisters often lead to cracking of the skin. When blisters break, small raw areas of tissue are exposed causing pain and swelling. Discharges may occur as well. Itching and burning may increase as the infection spreads.

Athlete's foot may spread to the soles of the feet and to the toenails. The fungus also may spread to other parts of the body (ie. the groin and underarms) by those who scratch the infection and then touch themselves elsewhere. The organisms causing athlete's foot may persist for long periods. Consequently, the infection may also spread through fungal contamination of footwear, clothing, or bedsheets. As the fungal infection may violate skin integrity, this opens the possibility of secondary infections due to bacteria.

## **Prevention**

It is not easy to prevent athlete's foot because it is usually contracted in the dressing rooms, showers, and swimming pool locker rooms where bare feet come in contact with the fungus. However, proper

foot hygiene is effective in preventing an infection. Daily washing of the feet with soap and water, routine drying of the feet especially in between the toes, changing shoes and socks regularly to decrease moisture, and disinfecting bathroom and shower flooring help prevent the fungus from spreading and infecting the feet.

## **Tips**

- Avoid walking barefoot; Use shower shoes.
- Reduce perspiration by using Talcum powder.
- Wear light and airy shoes.
- Wear socks that keep your feet dry
- Change socks frequently if you perspire heavily.

**Treatment** Many fungicidal and fungistatic chemicals used for athlete's foot treatment fail because they do not contact the fungi in the horny layers of the skin. Topical or oral antifungal drugs are prescribed with growing frequency. In mild cases of the infection, it is important to keep the feet dry by dusting foot powder in shoes and socks. The feet should be bathed frequently, and all areas around the toes dried thoroughly.

**Consult Your Podiatrist** If an apparent fungus condition does not respond to proper foot hygiene and self-care within two weeks of treatment, consult your podiatrist. The podiatrist will determine if a fungus is truly the underlying cause of the problem. If it is, a specific treatment plan including the prescription of antifungal medications (applied topically or taken by mouth) will usually be suggested. It is important to take and or apply the prescribed medication(s) as instructed if optimal results are to be achieved. If a bacterial secondary infection is present, antibiotics such as penicillin may also be prescribed.