

Athlete's foot

Athlete's foot is an unsightly and irritating fungal infection that affects the skin of the feet. It is common among all ages, with the exception of young children. Despite its name, athlete's foot doesn't only develop on sporty feet, or the feet of young people who take a lot of exercise. Anyone who works on their feet all day, particularly in a hot room, is prone to athlete's foot.

The cause of athlete's foot is a fungus called *Tinea pedis*. It is contagious and the infection can be picked up just by walking barefoot across a damp floor, for example in a communal shower or changing room. The fungal spores are transferred from one person to another within the fragments of skin protein (keratin) that are continually being shed from the feet. They flourish in the moist, warm, environment found between the toes. At first the skin becomes itchy and sore, then it starts to crack and peel. Sometimes the skin may appear white or inflamed and weepy.

Most customers can recognise athlete's foot and will ask for a treatment over the counter. As it is usually a mild condition there are a number of effective products that can be recommended.

OTC athlete's foot preparations are available from the pharmacy as creams, sprays or powders. They usually contain an antifungal drug and sometimes additional agents which help to dry out the skin and/or an antiseptic to eradicate any bacteria which may present as a secondary infection. Treatment should be continued for two weeks after they symptoms have disappeared to ensure it is completely cured. There are a number of practical measures which customers can adopt to prevent reinfection:

- dry the feet carefully, paying particular attention to the area between the toes.
- Use a separate foot towel and do not share towels with any one else
- Cotton socks and leather shoes should be chosen which allow the feet to breathe
- Socks should be changed and washed before re-used.