

# Athlete's Foot

Information for patients

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## Podiatry Department

Podiatry Department – 0131 536 1627

Patients who are housebound, reside in a nursing home or hospital ward – 0131 446 4631

## What is Athlete's foot?

Athlete's foot is a fungal skin infection affecting the feet. It is most commonly found between the toes or under the arch of the foot, but can be found anywhere on the foot.

## What causes Athlete's foot?

Fungal infections grow in dark, warm and moist places. Athlete's foot is picked up very easily from surfaces where someone with this infection has walked barefoot. Changing rooms and swimming pool floors, shared bathing facilities and bath mats are all common places where you might pick it up. Sharing towels, socks or shoes can also spread this infection.

## Signs and symptoms

If you have Athlete's foot you might notice some of these symptoms:

- Itching
- Peeling or flaking skin
- Redness, heat or swelling
- A rash or very small blisters
- Painful cracked skin.

## Treatments available

Athlete's foot can be treated at home. Most chemists and supermarkets stock anti-fungal treatments and your pharmacist can give you advice if you are unsure.

If you notice that the skin is broken (an open wound), then avoid putting Athlete's foot treatments on it until it has healed.

1. Wash your hands using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds
2. Prepare a clean basin with warm water and add 2 tablespoons of salt. Submerge the foot for five minutes
3. After five minutes remove your foot from the water and leave it to air dry
4. Once dry cover the toe with a clean dressing or plaster. These are available from your local chemist or supermarket.

Every 2 days, remove the dressing and repeat steps 1 – 4 until the area has healed. You can then start using the Athlete’s foot treatment.

Anti-fungal treatments come in creams, dry powders and foot sprays. They can help relieve your symptoms and treat the infection. Follow the advice on the product you are using for the best results. It’s important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after touching the affected area to prevent it spreading to other areas of your body.

There are simple steps you can take to prevent Athlete’s foot from coming back:

- Wash and dry your feet thoroughly every day. Pay particular attention between your toes
- Avoid putting creams and lotions between your toes
- Change into a pair of clean dry socks each day
- If you are prone to Athlete’s foot or have particularly sweaty feet, then applying surgical spirit between your toes a few times a week can be helpful. It reduces moisture, making fungal infection less likely to grow. You can buy surgical spirit from your local chemist
- If you have diabetes you should keep your blood glucose within the levels advised by your doctor or diabetes nurse. High blood glucose levels can make you more prone to infections and delayed healing
- Always use a separate, clean dry towel for drying your feet when you have Athlete’s foot. This will stop the infection spreading to other areas of your body
- If you have Athlete’s foot you should thoroughly disinfect your bathmat after every use to avoid spreading it to others and re-infecting yourself
- Avoid walking barefoot in communal areas. Flip-flops are recommended in gyms and swimming pool changing rooms
- Leave shoes out to air dry properly before wearing them again. Don’t leave them in sports bags or cupboards when damp.

## When to seek help

You should seek help from your Pharmacist or GP for further advice if:

- Your Athlete's foot is not responding to the treatment you are using
- The infection keeps coming back despite following the advice in this leaflet.

You should seek help from your Podiatrist if:

- You have broken skin which is not healing
- You notice pus or fluid leaking from the area
- The surrounding skin becomes red, hot, swollen.

If you are not yet a patient of the Podiatry Department you can self-refer by asking for a self-referral form from your GP reception or by downloading one from our website:

<https://weare.nhslothian.scot/podiatry/access-to-the-service/>

It's important to give as much information as you can when contacting us and completing the referral form. This will help us to prioritise you. If you are housebound, please ask your GP to refer you.

## Follow-up care

If your foot has changed shape you may need prescription footwear from the Orthotics Department as it will be difficult to fit in to ordinary pre-made footwear. Your bespoke footwear will protect your foot from developing ulcers in high pressure areas.

Nerve damage and foot deformity means that you will be at greater risk of foot ulcerations. You will be given regular appointments with the Podiatry Department for ongoing monitoring and treatment to reduce this risk.

**If you notice redness moving from the toe towards the top of the foot or leg, are feeling sick, shaking or have a high temperature these may be signs of sepsis. You should contact NHS 24 for urgent advice by dialling 111.**