

No mean feet

Often referred to as athlete's foot, tinea pedis – a common fungal infection that affects the feet – can be picked up by anyone. However, there's plenty of ways to make your feet happy again, writes Rebecca Howden.

Fungus thrives in warm, damp places and spreads easily. For this reason, public or shared showers, athletic facilities and changing rooms are common places to catch tinea pedis. Other factors, like wearing close-fitting shoes, excessive sweating or a suppressed immune system, may also encourage fungal foot infections to grow and spread.

In some cases of tinea pedis, the symptoms may not even be noticeable, or will just appear as dry and flaky skin. For others, a red, scaly rash will develop on the soles of the feet (known as moccasin-type tinea pedis), and the skin may itch or burn. Cracking, splitting and peeling between the toes (interdigital tinea pedis) is also common. Sometimes the dry flakes may spread onto the sides and tops of the feet. In severe cases, the skin can become very painful and blister, bleed, ooze or weep.

National Pharmacies pharmacist Carmel Papastamatis says the good news is there are plenty of antifungal creams, gels, powders and sprays that your pharmacist can recommend to help clear up the infection and soothe the affected area.

"Athlete's foot is one of the most common fungal skin infections that we see in the community," Papastamatis says. There are

plenty of anti-fungal products on the market to help. However, says Papastamatis, "when you use these topical treatments, it's important to not just treat the local area, but also to go past it and apply it to the sides and the soles of the feet, because it spreads so easily."

Depending on the product, the treatment can take between one and four weeks, and Papastamatis emphasises that you need to keep applying as directed for the specified amount of time, even when the symptoms seem to have disappeared. "Often people stop using the product as soon as the redness or itchiness and flakiness goes away, which usually happens after a couple of days," she says. "The fact is, there will still be fungal spores sitting around, and if you don't continue treatment, it comes back just as easily as it went away. Even if you think you haven't got it anymore, you need to continue the treatment for the specified period of time, or it is almost guaranteed to come back."

If symptoms keep coming back after topical treatment, a doctor may prescribe a course of oral antifungals. Laboratory blood tests to make sure there is no liver disease may be required before taking, as the active ingredients in these medications may cause liver damage if you have a pre-existing condition.

Tinea can also affect the toenails in a condition known as tinea unguium, or onychomycosis. This infection will usually start with a discoloured area at the corner of the big toe and slowly spread towards the cuticle. You may notice changes in the nails like brittleness, loosening or lifting up of the nail, crumbling on the outside edges, debris trapped under the nail, thickening, or white or yellow streaks on the sides.

Like tinea pedis treatment, topical products can be effective depending on how extensive the onychomycosis is. "If you have fungal nail infections you've probably got some kind of fungal feet issue as well, because they tend to go hand in hand if it's not treated," Papastamatis says. 🚫

PREVENTING FUNGAL FOOT INFECTIONS

The following tips can help you reduce your risk of catching a fungal infection:

- After washing, dry the skin thoroughly, particularly between the toes and within skin folds
- Keep your toenails clean and clipped short
- Wear breathable shoes as much as possible
- Keep the feet dry by wearing absorbent cotton socks rather than synthetics – such as polyester or nylon – and changing out of damp shoes and socks as soon as possible
- Always wear thongs around swimming pools, gym changing rooms, public or shared showers athletic facilities and other communal areas to avoid picking up and spreading tinea spores

HELPLINES



Daktagold cream ¹ For topical application in the treatment of dermatophyte infections of the skin (30g \$22.99, members \$18.39) **Daktarin Spray Powder** ² For the treatment of onychomycoses caused by dermatophytes, yeasts and moulds (100g \$16.99, members \$13.59) **Loceryl Nail Lacquer** ³ For the treatment of onychomycosis caused by dermatophytes, yeasts and moulds (\$89.99, members \$71.99) **Canesten Topical Cream 1%** ⁴ For the treatment of fungal, skin infections (50g \$14.75 members \$11.80) **Lamisil Once** (4g \$29.49 members \$23.59) **Mycil Tinea Powder** (55g \$11.49 members \$9.19)

¹ Always read the label. Use only as directed. If symptoms persist see your doctor or healthcare professional. ASMI 21050-0912