

Athlete's Foot

What is Athlete's Foot?

Athlete's foot is relatively common and is a fungal infection of the skin usually seen in between the toes, or on the sole of the foot. Athlete's foot can be very uncomfortable at its worst, or mildly itchy at its least severe. It causes changes in the structure of the skin, often causing skin to flake, peel or even split. Itching the skin increases the likelihood of the skin splitting, which in turn can lead to a secondary infection.



What causes it?

The infection is caused by dermatophytes which thrive in the conditions we place our feet in every day. Inside shoes the environment is dark, warm and moist, which just happens to be the perfect environment for a fungal infection to thrive. The infection can be spread by direct contact, or by touching a surface that has been in contact with infected skin, this can commonly be gym floors, towels, bed sheets etc. Gyms and changing rooms are often cited as places for the infection to spread due to the warm moist environment.

What will happen if I leave it untreated?

If left untreated the fungal infection can spread infecting nails and other surrounding areas, this leads to fungal nail infections which can be very uncomfortable and lead to nail discolouration and to a very distinct odour.

What can help?

Make sure to dry your feet gently but thoroughly after washing them, particularly the areas between your toes, also wearing cotton socks and roomy shoes that allow your feet to 'breathe' can be a great help towards avoiding any infection developing. It is recommended that you wear a fresh pair of socks, tights or stockings every day and it can be helpful to not share towels and socks with other people, and to ensure that towels are washed regularly this will help to get rid of any fungal residue that builds up. If you are likely to find yourself in shared locker rooms or showers it is best not to walk around barefoot, wearing flip-flops can be a useful way to avoid picking up any fungal infections.

What are the treatment options?

Topical treatments are very effective in the treatment of athlete's foot, with some of the newer preparations only requiring one application every 3 months. It is very important to make sure that all socks and hosiery are washed on a hot wash on the day of treatment to prevent re-infection. Make sure that you follow the instructions on any topical treatment as you may need to continue with treatment even if the symptoms have subsided. If the symptoms persist following topical treatment, seek advice from your Podiatrist.