



Drs. Keitley, Bromwich, Norman, Tiffney, Digby, Wickett & Mawdsley

The Avenue Surgery  
1 The Avenue, Cirencester, GL7 1EH

St Peters Road Surgery  
1 St Peters Road, Cirencester, GL7 1RF

[www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk](http://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk)

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## **SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON ATHLETE'S FOOT AND FUNGAL NAIL INFECTIONS**

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### **Athlete's foot**

Athlete's foot is a common fungal infection of the skin. Fungal germs (fungi) often occur in small numbers on skin where they usually do no harm. However, if conditions are right, they can invade the skin causing infection. Feet provide a warm, dark, and humid environment, which are ideal conditions for fungus to grow. Athlete's foot can be passed from person to person through contaminated towels, clothing, or surfaces. Scratching can also spread the infection. Most cases of athlete's foot are mild and can be treated at home.

### **Symptoms**

Athlete's foot causes an itchy rash to develop in the spaces between your toes. Your skin may also be red, scaly, flaky, or dry. The rash may spread gradually along the toes and soles of the feet if left untreated.

You may also have other symptoms such as:

- Cracked skin
- Blisters (which may be oozing or crusting)
- Swollen skin
- Burning or stinging skin.

### **Complications**

If athlete's foot is not treated effectively, the infection can sometimes spread to other parts of your body, such as the toenails or the palms of your hands.

### **Fungal nail infection**

The most common symptom of a fungal nail infection is the nail becoming thickened and discoloured. The nail can turn white, black, yellow, or green. A fungal nail infection is usually painless and, in most cases, fungal nail infections will not cause any further complications.

## How to treat and prevent athlete's foot and fungal nail infections

### **General self-care measures**

- Wash your feet regularly using soap and water and dry them thoroughly.
- Keep your feet cool and dry, wear clean cotton socks and avoid wearing trainers.
- Treat athlete's foot as soon as possible to avoid spreading.
- use a separate pair of clippers to cut any infected nails to avoid spreading the infection.
- Wear well-fitting shoes, without high heels or narrow toes.
- Avoid sharing towels and ensure that your towels are washed regularly.
- Consider replacing your old footwear, as this could be a source of reinfection.

### **Medications for athletes' foot**

Antifungal medication works by killing the fungi that are causing your infection. Topical antifungal medicines, which are applied directly to the rash, are widely available from pharmacies without a prescription. Treatments are available as a cream or spray. One example is Clotrimazole cream 1%. Your pharmacist can recommend the most suitable treatment for you.

### **Tips**

- Make sure that the area is dry before applying the treatment.
- Apply directly to the rash and some surrounding healthy skin to prevent re-infection.
- Apply for as long as recommended in the instructions that come with the medicine.
- Use medication for 1-2 weeks after symptoms have disappeared to ensure full clearance.

### **Medications for fungal nail infections**

Mild fungal nail infections, which are not causing any problems, may not need treatment. Your pharmacist can recommend the most suitable treatment for you.

- **Antifungal paints**
  - Can be bought from pharmacies.
  - Used to treat nail infections only (Not suitable for treating athlete's foot).
  - Take a long time (6-12 months) to clear the nail infection and require perseverance.
  - Have limited success so GPs don't prescribe these due to *poor evidence of effectiveness*.
- **Antifungal tablets**
  - Only available on prescription.
  - You may need to take the tablet for several months
  - Although more effective, oral treatments are more likely to cause side effects than paints.

*If you have diabetes or poor circulation and get any type of foot or nail infection you should contact your GP practice or podiatrist.*

## **Useful contacts**

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)
- NHS Choices, [www.nhs.uk/conditions/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/)

### **If you have further questions:**

Call the **practice** on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122  
If you require **urgent** medical advice, call 111 (24 Hrs)  
In an **emergency** call **999**