

Fungal skin infections in athletes

What are fungal skin infections?

Fungal skin infections affect the top layer of skin. They thrive on moist areas of the body, such as under the breasts, in the groin, and on the feet. Some infections cause no discomfort. Others involve itching, swelling, and pain.

Which fungal conditions are common in athletes?

Athlete's foot, jock itch, and onychomycosis are common problems in athletes.

Athlete's foot is found between the toes and on the sides and soles of the feet. Symptoms range from mild scaling to an itchy, painful rash with fluid-filled blisters.

Fungal infections of the fingernails or toenails can cause extreme pain and lead to nail loss. This problem often occurs in people with athlete's foot.

Jock itch is usually a problem only in men or boys. It appears around the pubic area and on the top inner thighs and can spread as far as the buttocks. People with jock itch often have untreated athlete's foot, too.

Why do athletes get these conditions?

Physical activity raises body temperature and causes extreme sweating. These factors put athletes at risk for these infections. Athletes are also constantly exposed to fungi in locker rooms, spas, and pools.

How are infections treated?

Some fungal infections are treated with antifungal creams or ointments. Others require oral medication, too. To avoid future problems, your doctor may prescribe a low dosage of an oral drug for an extended period of time.

What can I do to prevent these problems?

To help prevent fungal foot conditions, keep your feet cool, clean, and dry by

- Cleaning your feet well after each workout
- Towel drying your feet completely after showering (use a blow dryer, if necessary)
- Wearing socks under shoes
- Wearing cotton socks
- Wearing shoes made of cloth or leather (not vinyl), allowing the feet to breathe.

Other ways to prevent foot problems:

- Never walk barefoot in gyms or around pools.
- Trim toenails short and straight across.
- Discard old shoes, which may be contaminated with fungi.

To help prevent jock itch, keep your groin area cool, clean, and dry by

- Bathing and changing all clothing as soon as possible after a workout
- Towel drying your groin area completely after showering
- Putting on socks before underwear to avoid introducing fungus into the groin area
- Wearing loose undergarments and outer wear.

NOTES
