

Fungal Infections



What is it?

A fungal infection of the skin and/or nails is very common and is caused by organisms called Dermatophytes. They can be picked up from soils, animals and other people through direct contact with the infected skin or through contact with skin cells found in places such as shoes, socks, changing room floors and carpets. The warm, dark, moist conditions as found in shod feet encourage growth.

Typical Symptoms

Nail infection

- Also called onychomycosis. It occurs mostly in people over the age of 55 but can be seen in younger people especially those that frequent gyms, public swimming pools and wear nail polish.
- The fungus will cause a white, yellow or brown discolouration. In severe cases it causes a 'rotting' or crumbling of the nail plate and an unpleasant musty smell.

Skin infection

- Also called Tinea Pedis or Athlete's Foot as it is commonly seen in athletes whose feet sweat a lot and provide the best environment for the fungus to grow.
- Usually found between the toes it appears as a red rash, sometimes with tiny blisters, and is very itchy. It also occurs on the sole of the foot under the arches or on tops of the toes.

Treatment

- Treatment includes topical antifungal agents - found in chemists and available over-the-counter - and oral treatment which is usually reserved for severe cases as the medication can cause many side effects.
- Topical agents are broad-spectrum (they kill all common dermatophytes) and can be applied either daily or weekly as per directions. For the skin, a cream is most effective whereas for nails, most treatments are a liquid.
- Whichever treatment you choose to use, you must use it regularly until the rash has gone or nail has grown through completely clear.

- It is generally a good idea to continue treating a skin infection for 1 week after the rash has disappeared to ensure complete eradication.
- With nail infections, due to the slowness of toenail growth, treatment can take up to a year or longer and is therefore very frustrating. There is not one topical treatment that works better than another.
- Laser therapy is also available. It is very effective but also expensive.

Prevention

- It is very important to wash and dry your feet thoroughly. Letting soapy water run over your feet in the shower is not sufficient to eradicate dead skin build-up, fungus and bacteria.
- If you have a particularly bad or persistent infection, make sure you change your socks regularly, even during the day if you find your feet sweat a lot. Wash socks separately with antifungal clothes treatments and don't forget to treat your shoes as well. There are powders and sprays available to help reduce the fungi that invade footwear and socks.
- If you have very sweaty feet, make sure you air dry your shoes at the end of the day – never put on damp shoes. You can also use an antiperspirant for the feet to help sweating.
- Wear thongs in public changing areas and swimming pools.
- Don't wear nail polish for long periods of time. The nail plate becomes cracked and susceptible to picking up infection. If you like to wear polish, have it on for no longer than 2 weeks before removing and leaving off for 1-2 weeks before re-applying.
- Don't share nail polish or use any you think may have been used by someone else. This includes polish at beauty salons. Take your own polish to avoid picking up someone else's infection.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above information please feel free to contact Rachael at Pod Co Podiatry

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