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## Dermatology Patient Education

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# Fungal Infections of the Skin

For most people, a fungal infection causes a mild skin rash or itching of the skin. Most fungal infections develop on the skin, but a fungal infection also can affect the nails and hair.

If a person has a weak immune system due to a medical condition such as HIV or cancer, a fungal infection may be more severe.

Tinea is the medical name for fungal skin infections.

### HOW DID I GET A FUNGAL INFECTION?

It is easy to get a fungal infection. Fungi (plural of fungus) spread easily from person to person.

Many people get a fungal infection through close personal contact with someone who has a fungal infection, for example, sharing an infected object such as a towel or comb. You also can get a fungal infection while walking barefoot on an infected floor. Some people get a fungal infection by touching an animal that has fungi on its fur.

People increase their risk of getting a fungal infection when their skin stays wet for long periods. Fungi grow quickly in warm, moist areas. Underclothes, shower tiles, hot tubs, indoor tanning beds, and pool decks are common places for fungi to grow.

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FUNGAL INFECTIONS AND HOW ARE THEY TREATED?

#### Athlete's Foot (Tinea Pedis)

Athlete's foot usually starts between the toes, causing the skin to itch, peel, and flake. Without treatment, athlete's foot can worsen. Some people even get itchy blisters on their feet. The bottom of your foot also may look dry and scaly. Most people catch athlete's foot by walking barefoot through a public place such as a locker room or deck of a swimming pool.

Sometimes, a dermatologist can tell if you have athlete's foot by looking at your skin. Other times a medical test is necessary. Athlete's foot can look like another skin condition such as contact dermatitis or psoriasis. These skin conditions also can cause a rash.

If you have a mild case of athlete's foot, an anti-fungal cream often works well to relieve the burning and itching. When the infection is more severe, a dermatologist may write a prescription for anti-fungal pills.



Athlete's Foot

### **Nail Fungus (Onychomycosis, Tinea unguium)**

This fungal infection often affects the big toe. However, any or all nails may be involved. It can cause the nail to thicken and turn yellow. Sometimes the affected nail crumbles. Nail fungus tends to be more common in people who have had athlete's foot for a while or have injured a nail.

A fungal infection also can affect a fingernail, but this is less common. Whether the fungus affects the fingernails or toenails, it can be hard to treat. To clear a fungal infection, prescription anti-fungal medications that you brush on the nail or pills may be necessary. Some people find that nail infections return frequently.



Nail Fungus

### **Jock Itch (Tinea Cruris)**

Jock itch is a rash that begins in the groin area. This rash is itchy, can flake and has a red border. Jock itch affects both men and women. Individuals who sweat a lot may be more likely to develop jock itch. Treatment can include anti-fungal creams that are available without a prescription. See your dermatologist for prescription creams that may work faster.

### **Ringworm (Tinea Corporis)**

Ringworm causes a red, itchy, flaky patch that looks more like a ring as it grows. It is common to have several areas of ringworm at once in different body areas. Ringworm is very common in young children who spend time in close contact at daycare centers or schools. The infection also can affect dogs and cats, and these pets can transmit the infection to humans.

There are anti-fungal creams available without a prescription that can treat ringworm. If the ringworm is persistent, your dermatologist may treat it with a prescription anti-fungal cream or anti-fungal pill.



Ringworm

### **Scalp Ringworm (Tinea Capitis)**

Scalp ringworm is most common in children. It can cause round, bald patches and flaking of the skin on the scalp. It is easily spread through shared brushes, hats or pillows. It is important to see a dermatologist for treatment. With the right treatment, any hair that is lost will often grow back in time.

## Tips for Managing Fungal Infections

To prevent a fungal infection, or from becoming infected again, here are some things you can do:

- To protect your feet from athlete's foot, wear shower shoes, flip-flops, or sandals in gyms, shower or locker areas, pools, and hotel rooms.
- When at the gym, wipe down exercise equipment, particularly bicycle seats and chairs, before and after use.
- Avoid using another person's personal items, especially if you know they have a fungal infection. This includes towels, hair brushes, combs, and shoes.
- Wash your hands if you have touched a part of your body that has a fungal infection or an animal that is infected. This will reduce your chances of getting or spreading the infection.

A board-certified dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating the medical, surgical, and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair and nails. To learn more or find a dermatologist in your area, visit [aad.org](http://aad.org) or call toll free (888) 462-DERM (3376).

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