

Fungal Infections



What is a fungal infection?

Fungal infections affecting the skin and nails of the feet are triggered by tiny organisms known as fungi. Similar to bacteria and viruses, these fungi are invisible to the naked eye. They are present in various environments like the air and our everyday surroundings. Flourishing in dark, damp, warm conditions, they thrive by targeting human skin and nails.

Signs & symptoms

The most typical fungal infection of the skin is Athletes Foot or by its medical name tinea pedis. Most commonly affecting the skin between the toes or on the bottom of the feet, it causes peeling, redness, itching and sometimes a burning sensation as well as blisters. The infection can spread to your toenails.

Infection of the nails is called onychomycosis. The nails appear thickened and discoloured and frequently have a crumbly texture. Not all nail symptoms like this are due to fungal infection, psoriasis and poor circulation can cause a similar appearance. Diagnosis can be confirmed by a laboratory test.



Prevention

These fungi are highly contagious. Prevention is key. Ensure you practice good daily foot hygiene. The feet should be washed in warm soapy water, then rinsed before drying carefully, paying particular attention to the skin between and beneath the toes. If your toes are very tight together, this reduces the natural air-flow between them and makes the skin more vulnerable. The use of a little surgical spirit between the toes at bedtime, can work wonders. A cotton bud is a useful applicator. Leave the spirit to vaporise after the application and this will act as an astringent to the skin and at the same time help to remove any residual moisture from the day's activities.

Footwear should be composed of natural materials to allow the feet to "breathe". Socks of wool or cotton and shoes of real leather are advised for people who are prone to this problem.

Treatment

Fungal infections should not be left untreated.

Usually, fungal skin infections respond very well to specialist creams, ointments, paints and powders. These are called topical medications. Your Foot Health Practitioner will be able to recommend a suitable preparation for your problem. Nails may require debridement and additional treatment from a GP or podiatrist.