

Tinea (Ringworm)

Tinea is a common skin infection caused by a fungus. It most often affects warm, moist areas of skin and commonly occurs between the toes and around the groin. It can also affect other body areas, including the scalp and nails. Most cases of tinea can be effectively treated with medicines available from a pharmacist.

Tinea is sometimes called ‘ringworm’, which is misleading, as it has nothing to do with worms and the skin rash is not always ring-shaped. Tinea is contagious, and is spread from person to person directly through skin-to-skin contact, or indirectly through towels, clothes and floors. People can also catch it from animals with tinea (e.g., cats, dogs, horses, mice, guinea pigs).

Signs and symptoms

Foot tinea (athlete’s foot)

- Infected areas may be red, scaling, peeling, cracking.
- Often itchy; may burn or sting.
- Most often occurs between the toes.
- May have an unpleasant smell.
- Small fluid-filled blisters may form in rash area.

Groin tinea (jock itch)

- Itchy, burning, red rash on the inner thighs. It may also occur on the buttocks, genitals and anal area. Rash usually has scaly edges, clearing in the centre.
- Small fluid filled blisters may form in rash area.

Tinea on other body areas

- Slightly raised, itchy, red and often circular patch (or patches) on the skin with a scaly edge and clearing centre; sometimes with small fluid filled blisters in the patch.
- Scalp – usually causes itchy, pink, scaly patches and hair loss (the hairs break off leaving a bald patch).
- Nails – can become white, grey or yellow and thick, deformed and crumbly. Toenails get infected more often than fingernails.

Risks

Tinea infection on any body area is more likely to develop if you:

- Live or work in hot, humid climates
- Have diabetes
- Have a weakened immune system
- Work with animals
- Are a child or spend time with children
- Perspire a lot
- Do not dry skin well after bathing.

Foot tinea is more likely to develop if you:

- Wear synthetic (eg nylon, acrylic) socks that make feet sweat
- Go barefoot in public showers and around pools
- Wear tightly fitting shoes or plastic or rubber shoes (e.g., gum boots)
- Have sweaty feet
- Don’t wash and dry between toes properly.

Foot tinea is easily and commonly caught from infected scales of skin dropped around showers, change rooms, swimming pools and spas.

Groin tinea is more likely to develop if you:

- Perspire a lot
- Are overweight
- Are male.



Important

Consult a doctor if:

- The rash starts to ooze, weep or smell
- Nails are infected – look yellow, thick and crumbly
- The rash does not get better with treatment
- You also have diabetes, poor circulation or a weakened immune system
- Hair is being lost from tinea on the scalp.

A doctor may scrape some skin to test for tinea. Do not put anything on the skin before the scraping is taken as it may interfere with the test.

Medicines

Tinea infections may be effectively treated with non-prescription antifungal creams, gels, lotions, powders, solutions and sprays available from a pharmacist.

- Follow the product instructions carefully. It is important to continue treatment for as long as directed, as the tinea rash may disappear before the fungus has been completely cleared from the skin. It may take several weeks of regular treatment to completely clear tinea from the skin
- Anti-fungal powder dusted inside shoes and socks can help treat foot tinea and prevent re-infection.
- To stop infection spreading, it is important to thoroughly wash hands and scrub under nails after applying topical treatments.

A severe tinea infection, or nail or scalp tinea, usually needs treatment with anti-fungal tablets, which must be prescribed by a doctor.

Self care

To protect against tinea infection:

- Do not share towels, shoes, socks, underwear, hats or hair brushes and combs.
- Wash socks, underwear, towels and bathmats in hot water and detergent, or use a laundry product designed to prevent re-infection. Ask your pharmacist.
- While infected, avoid transferring the tinea to another body area. Use a separate, fresh towel to dry infected area and wash hands well after touching infected area.
- Check family animals for tinea. On animals it looks like a patch of skin with fur missing – ask a vet.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Foot tinea

- Wash and dry feet well every day. Gently rub the skin between the toes with a cotton bud to remove dead skin.
- Inspect your feet every day and keep them clean and dry, especially between the toes.
- Go barefoot or wear sandals to air feet, especially in warm, humid weather.
- Wear socks made of 100% cotton – they soak up moisture. Change socks daily, or more regularly in hot weather.
- Allow sweaty shoes to dry out before wearing again.
- Wear sandals or thongs around public showers and pools.
- Use an antiperspirant product if your feet sweat a lot – ask your pharmacist.
- Clean the base of the shower or bath with disinfectant, so you don't re-infect yourself and others.

Groin tinea

- Wear loose, cotton clothing – boxer shorts allow more airflow, and reduce chafing.
- Dry skin carefully after showering. A dusting powder may help.
- Wash and dry skin after physical activity or if sweaty.

Related fact cards

- *Eczema and Dermatitis*
- *Hair loss*
- *Diabetes – Type 1*
- *Nappy rash*
- *Diabetes – Type 2*

For more information

Health/Insite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

New Zealand Dermatological Society Inc – website www.dermnetnz.org

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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