

HOW ARE FUNGAL PROBLEMS TREATED?

Depending on the type of infection you have, various kinds of medication may be used in treating your fungal problem. Successful treatment usually involves a combination of medication and self-care.



Athlete's Foot

If your condition is not serious, over-the-counter and prescription powders, lotions, or ointments can often help treat scaling, itching, and inflammation. Foot soaks may help dry excessive perspiration, but talk with your podiatrist first. If your athlete's foot doesn't improve, your podiatrist may prescribe stronger medication.

Fungal Nails

Since fungal nails are usually more resistant and more difficult to treat than athlete's foot, topical or oral antifungal medications may be prescribed. Secondary bacterial infections may require antibiotic treatment. Debridement may be suggested and involves trimming, filing, or grinding away the diseased part of the nail. Permanent nail removal is another possible form of treatment.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT FUNGAL PROBLEMS?

Your daily habits play a big part in helping to prevent fungal problems. Follow the suggestions below, and see your podiatrist if you have more problems.



Dry Carefully

Always dry your feet thoroughly after you bathe or shower. Be sure to dry between your toes. Foot powders can also help absorb moisture.

Alternate Shoes

To help avoid fungus-causing perspiration, alternate the shoes you wear so they have at least a day to dry out. Also, try to wear shoes made of breathable materials like leather or canvas.

Change Socks

Ask your podiatrist what kind of socks are best for you. And change them often.

Beware of Bare Feet

Wear sandals or thongs in public areas such as pools, showers, or locker rooms.

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PODIATRIC CARE

FUNGAL PROBLEMS





WHAT IS PODIATRY?

Podiatric medicine focuses on diagnosing, treating, and preventing foot and ankle problems, such as fungal problems. Your podiatrist (doctor of podiatric medicine) is highly trained through years of study and clinical practice, including a bachelor's degree program and four years of podiatric medical school. Podiatrists may also have one or more years of residency training, studying other aspects of foot care and surgery. Podiatrists continue to stay informed about the latest research and developments in the field.

In treating your feet, your podiatrist may also work with your other healthcare providers to give you appropriate and comprehensive care.

F o o t n o t e

Shoes made of synthetics such as plastic allow fungus to breed by trapping heat and moisture around your feet.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON FUNGAL PROBLEMS?

The fungal problems seen most often are athlete's foot and fungal nails. A fungus is a common mold that thrives in dark, warm, moist areas. On the feet, it can grow on and between toes, as well as on soles and toenails. Fungal problems can be a result of environment (socks, shoes, heat, and humidity) or weakened immunity (diseases such as diabetes). If fungal infections are untreated, they can develop into serious secondary bacterial infections, which may require antibiotics to treat.

Athlete's Foot

A chronic infection caused by various types of fungus, athlete's foot is often spread in places where people go barefoot, such as public showers or swimming pools. The condition ranges from mild scaling and itching to painful inflammation and blisters. It usually starts between the toes or on the arch and may spread to the bottom and sides of the foot.



Fungal Nails

These are often caused by the spread of fungal infections like athlete's foot, or by the use of artificial nails or nail polish. Injury to the nail may be another cause. Fungal nails may become thickened, inflamed, or sensitive, and turn unnatural colors.

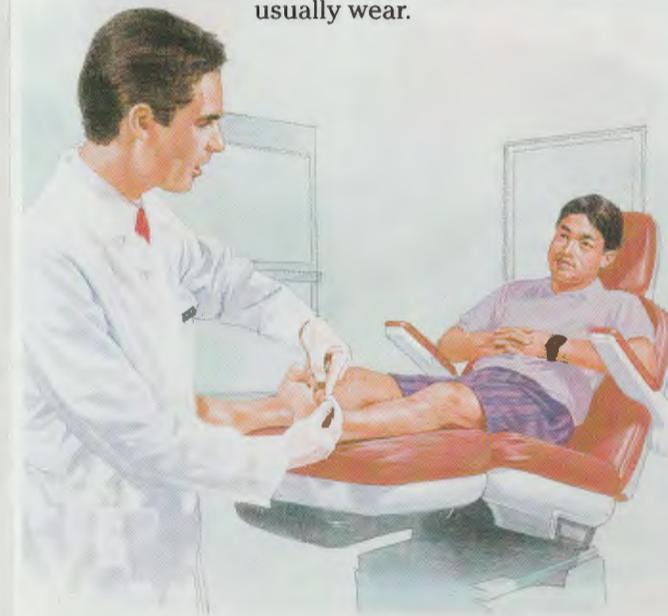


Evaluation

Since fungal problems may be related to other medical problems, your podiatrist needs to look at your medical history, examine your foot and skin, and possibly do other tests.

Medical History

Your podiatrist asks you about any problems you've had in the past, any medications you're taking, the type of work and activities you do, and the style of shoes you usually wear.



Exam

During your foot examination, your podiatrist checks for breaks in the skin, growths, and odor (which can be a sign of bacteria). Your skin is examined for flaking or scaling, and your nails are checked for color, thickness, and inflammation.

Tests

Your podiatrist may take a culture (sample) from the infected area. The culture may be examined under a microscope or observed in a medium. These tests can help to determine the cause of your problem or identify the type of fungus.