

Tinea

Symptoms

Tinea is a fungal skin infection. It sometimes forms a round red rash with a pink central area, so many people also refer to it as 'ringworm', although it is not a worm at all! Depending on where the infection occurs on the body, it can also be given other names.

Tinea can occur on the scalp (*Tinea capitis*), nails (*Tinea unguium*), body (*Tinea corporis*), or groin area (*Tinea cruris*).

On the scalp, tinea may begin as a small, red, round, scaly patch which slowly gets larger. The hairs in the patch become brittle and break off leaving a bald patch.

Tinea can also occur on moist areas of the body, such as the groin area or under women's breasts. It usually begins as a round or oval patch, which soon becomes scaly. The centre of the patch then clears, leaving a ring-shaped sore. Tinea in these places can cause severe itching with raised red 'weeping' patches.

Nail infections of tinea present as discoloured nails (white, yellow or brown) that are rough, thick and crumbly. Sometimes nails can also separate from the nailbed.

Tinea on the feet (*Tinea pedis*) is called 'Athlete's Foot'. It occurs commonly as soft, whitish skin between the toes, often with cracks and may be itchy. In severe cases, small blisters, raw areas and scaly patches can be seen. This form of tinea often affects young adults, and people whose feet perspire a lot.

Causes

Tinea is highly contagious and you can get tinea from:

- direct skin-to-skin contact with another person who has the infection
- using the personal items of an infected person
- playing with animals infected with tinea such as cats and dogs
- stepping on bathmats and wet floors of bathrooms, or public showers where skin cells from an infected person are shed
- coming into contact with infected soil (this is rare).

Lifestyle options

Tinea infections usually need to be treated with medicines, but there are some steps you can take to manage tinea, and prevent it recurring:

- Wash every day and dry well with an absorbent towel. Dry well under breasts and in-between the toes. Wash an infected scalp every day.
- Wash personal items such as towels, socks, underwear and bedding such as sheets and pillowcases with hot water and detergent and dry them in the sun.
- Use separate towels for your body and your feet, so you don't spread infection.
- Don't share hair brushes, combs or towels with other people.
- Check the fur of cats and other pets often, and if they have patchy skin or missing fur, take them to the vet for treatment.
- Wear open footwear where possible.
- Let shoes dry out completely in fresh air and sun. If you sweat a lot, try to alternate daily which shoes you wear, particularly sports shoes.
- Wear thongs or shoes in public wet areas such as public showers and swimming pools.
- Wear loose cotton clothing, and cotton underwear if it is warm.
- Wear cotton, wool or other natural fibre socks.

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any other medicines, or if you have any other health conditions, because some over-the-counter medicines may not be suitable for you.

Antifungal medicines are available from the pharmacy. Creams generally work best, but gels, lotions or sprays can also be used and are easier on hairy areas. Antifungal sprays or powders can be used on the groin, under the breasts, or in socks to keep the areas dry.

Antifungal nail paint is available for mild nail infections.

Apply all antifungal treatments as directed. Continue for at least one week after the tinea infection appears to be cleared to prevent the fungal spores causing re-infection.

Antifungal laundry rinse can be used for washing your clothes.

Ask your pharmacist for advice on the most suitable treatment for you.

For severe tinea infections, your doctor may need to prescribe an oral antifungal treatment. See a doctor if:

- your rash does not heal with pharmacy medicines, starts to ooze, bleed or has a bad smell
- you have large patchy areas on your scalp
- your nail infection does not improve and looks very thick and crumbly
- you have diabetes, eczema (see *Eczema and Dry skin* Health Information Brochure), or a medical condition that weakens your immune system.

More information

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Dermnet NZ: www.dermnetnz.org

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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