# THE FUNGUS

SUMMER IS THE SEASON OF BARE FEET AND FLIP FLOPS, OF SWIMMING POOLS AND BALLGAMES AND LOTS OF SWEAT. AND THAT MAKES IT A BREEDING GROUND FOR FUNGUS TO CREEP INTO YOUR LIFE AND ONTO YOUR FEET.

health education • *foot fungus* 

BY COLLEEN COOKE

#### 🖉 🛛 BEYOND DRY SKIN

How can you tell if you simply have dry skin or if it's turned into a funga infection? Athlete's foot – or tinea pedis – can form in three ways:

- FLUID-FILLED BLISTERS CALLED VESICLES, usually on the bottom of the feet. These become itchy and eventually they pop and drain, leaving dry skin. Be careful about scratching these blisters too much; if you cause open sores, you run the risk of contracting a bacterial infection on top of a fungal infection.
- A MOCCASIN-SHAPED INFECTION. It starts with some soreness on the foot, and then the skin on the bottom or heel becomes thick and cracks.
- INTERSPACE INFECTION. The spaces between your toes look like you've been in the bathtub too long. The skin becomes scaly, then it peels and cracks. Again, this break in the skin can cause bacterial infection as well.

#### WHO GETS ATHLETE'S FOOT?

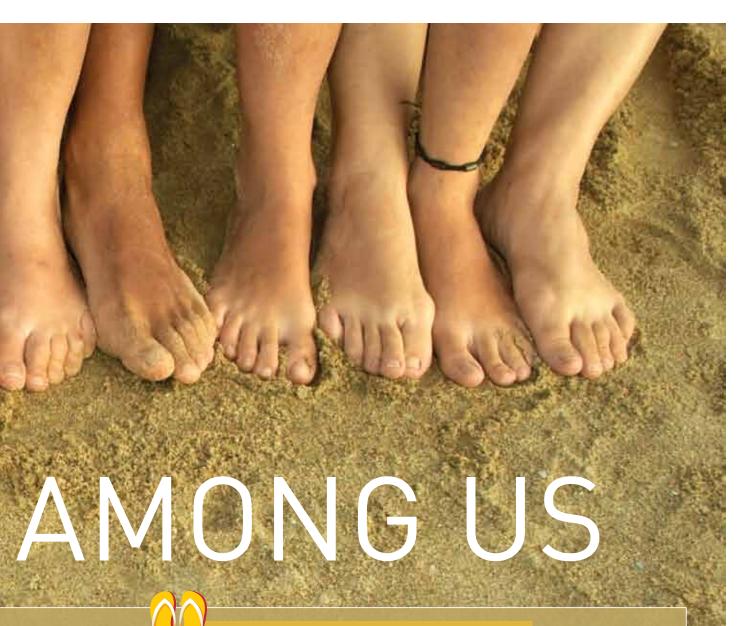
It's not just athletes, despite the name. Children and teenagers are prone to contracting the infection, sometimes because of poor hygiene or because they're more exposed to locker rooms and really sweaty feet. Dr. Eriksen says olde people tend to get th infection in the nails. Dry skin and psorias

"Dry skin and psoriasis can also look like athlete's foot, and it may be hard to distinguish one from the other," says Dr. Michael Fine of Fine Foot Care Center in North Kansas City. "You want to make sure you're treating the right condition."

The same fungus that causes the bottom of your foot to itch is also responsible for infections in your nails. "The nail is the harboring ground for this fungus," says Dr. Erich Eriksen of Fine Foot Care Center. "Once you have it in the nail, you're probably going to have it in the skin."

around swimming po

"Once it's on the skin and in the environment, it's easy to re-contaminate itself because **it's a fungus, it's contagious and it's found everywhere in the environment** – showers, beds, shoes, socks," Dr. Eriksen says.



#### CONTAGIOUS AND UBIQUITOUS

read by skin particles left on shower floors, ols, on towels and shoes.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

You can get athlete's foot on your hands. The fungus is equal opportunity, so if your hands are often in that moist, warm environment that the fungus favors, or if your hands come into contact with the fungus and you have a break in the skin on your hands or fingernails, it will make the leap there.

#### alth education

#### PREVENTION

- Check your feet in between

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- dry skin on the sides
- bumps on your feet cracked, blistered

itching, burning or

scales, cracks,

redness and scaling

#### REATMENT

out. There's a fine line between jumping the gun and sitting on it too long and letting it get worse

and it's allowed to get worse." **e** 

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