

# footprints

An informational newsletter for patients of APMA member podiatrists

Spring 2008

## Kick Athlete's Foot to the Curb

Whether you regularly give your feet a hard workout on the field, or just keep them comfortably elevated in "couch potato" mode, you might be surprised to hear that your feet are susceptible to a common ailment—athlete's foot. No matter what your level of exercise may be, however, your podiatrist is your best defense against this unwelcome condition.

Athlete's foot is a skin infection caused by a fungus, usually occurring between the toes or on the soles of the feet. The fungus most commonly attacks the feet because shoes create a warm, dark, and humid environment, which encourages fungus growth. The warmth and dampness of areas around swimming pools, showers, and locker rooms are also breeding grounds for fungi. Because this infection is common among athletes who use these facilities frequently, the term "athlete's foot" became popular. But anyone, regardless of their exercise level, can contract athlete's foot.

Some of the symptoms of athlete's foot can include one or more of the following: dry skin, itching, scaling, inflammation, and blisters. Blisters often lead to cracking of the skin. When blisters break, small, raw areas of tissue are exposed, causing pain and swelling. Itching and burning may increase as the infection spreads.

While it may not be possible to prevent athlete's foot, you can do much to avoid infection by practicing good foot hygiene. Washing the feet daily with soap and water, drying carefully, especially between the toes, and changing shoes and hose regularly to decrease moisture, help prevent the fungus from infecting the feet. Also helpful is daily use of a quality foot powder if recommended by your podiatrist.

There are many effective medications that can be used to treat and help control fungal infections like athlete's foot. A visit to your podiatrist and an evaluation of the infection will result in much

## Stress Fractures

A stress fracture is a tiny or incomplete crack in a bone that is often caused by overuse. Stress fractures occur most frequently in the foot and ankle, so your podiatrist is well trained to diagnose and treat this problem.

Stress fractures may be caused by a number of factors. Overuse or strain in the foot (fatigue fracture) is one of the most common causes, while weak bones (insufficiency fracture), caused by medical conditions such as osteoporosis, can also be a factor. Medications such as steroids can lead to stress fractures, as can a sudden increase in activity levels. All of these causes can and should be evaluated by your podiatrist when you have the signs and symptoms of a stress fracture.

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better outcomes than most over-the-counter treatments. The podiatrist will first determine if a fungus is the cause of the problem. If it is, a specific treatment plan, including the prescription of anti-fungal medication, applied topically or taken orally, may be suggested. If the infection is caused by bacteria, then antibiotics appropriately targeted against the bacteria may be prescribed. In most cases, the podiatrist can work with you to resolve the issue in just a few visits.

Podiatrists recommend a number of ways to lessen your chance of contracting athlete's foot. These include avoiding walking barefoot, using shower shoes in public areas, and attempting to reduce perspiration by using a good powder. APMA has several recommendations of foot powders that have received the Seal of Approval (see [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org)) It is also recommended that patients change shoes regularly and wear socks that keep feet dry and wick away moisture. Your doctor can recommend appropriate shoes and socks for your condition. •

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Those signs may include pain that increases with activity and decreases with rest, pain that increases over time, or pain that persists even at rest. Often a stress fracture will result in swelling and a spot that feels tender to the touch.

If you experience any pain during physical activity or any of the symptoms described, you should see your podiatrist. Prompt diagnosis and treatment of a stress fracture can often prevent further injury. The doctor will ask you to describe the signs and symptoms and then physically evaluate your foot. While x-rays will most likely be used for diagnosis, often stress fractures do not appear on regular x-rays for several weeks after the symptoms begin. In some cases, the fracture may never appear on an x-ray. In those cases, the doctor may recommend other diagnostic testing such as MRIs, ultrasounds, or bone scans.

Many stress fractures can be treated with rest, ice and over-the-counter pain relievers. For most people, an appropriate period of rest will be sufficient for the bone to heal. In other cases, your podiatrist may need to immobilize the affected bone with a cast, cast boot, fracture shoe, or a splint. In the most severe cases, a pin may be surgically inserted into the bone to hold it together and promote proper healing. However, surgical intervention is the treatment of last resort.

Here are a few simple steps to prevent stress fractures:

- Start new exercise programs slowly and progress gradually. Work with your doctor to design a routine that fits your fitness level.
- Avoid sudden intensity changes in your exercise routine.
- Always use the proper equipment for your sport. This includes finding the best shoe for your foot type.
- Cross-train to avoid repetitively stressing your feet.
- Visit your podiatrist to have custom shoe inserts (orthotics) made to improve foot function.
- Eat right and make sure that you include plenty of calcium and nutrients in your diet. •



## A Team Approach to Your Diabetes

Because diabetes is a systemic disease affecting many different parts of the body, the ideal case management requires a team approach. Your podiatrist is an integral part of that team, and he or she can be one key to your health management. Therefore, routine foot screenings by a podiatrist should be standard for all patients with diabetes and those at risk as well.



No one knows exactly how or why people develop diabetes, but once diagnosed, the disease is usually present for life. It is a hereditary disorder, and certain genetic indicators are known to increase the risk of developing the disease. What we do know for sure is that the incidence of diabetes in the U.S. is increasing at a staggering rate. We also know that some populations, including African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, are at higher risk for the disease.

Of all the risk factors, weight is the most important, with more than 80 percent of people with diabetes classified as overweight or obese. If you have already been diagnosed with diabetes, there are a few things you can do to prevent further complications from your disease:

- Wash and carefully dry your feet daily
- Inspect feet and toes daily
- Establish a healthy weight loss plan if you are overweight
- Wear socks designed specifically for diabetic patients
- Stop smoking
- Exercise
- See your podiatrist regularly for all foot care issues
- Never try to remove calluses, corns, or warts by yourself
- Don't go barefoot
- Don't drink alcohol in excess
- Wear properly measured and fitted shoes.

While there is no cure for diabetes, there is hope. With proper diet, exercise, medical care, and careful management at home, a person with diabetes can keep the most serious consequences of the disease at bay and enjoy a long, full life. Working with all your doctors together will ensure that your health and well-being are in good hands. Your podiatrist is an integral part of your healthcare team; make sure to make time to visit your podiatrist on a regular basis if you have been diagnosed with diabetes. •