

HERBAL TREATMENT OF ATHLETES FOOT

Q. Is there a herbal treatment for *athlete's foot*?

A.

Athlete's foot or *tinea pedis*, is an infection caused by a fungus affecting the skin of the feet. It usually begins between the toes with itching, redness and peeling and can spread to the soles of the feet and the toenails, which become thickened, discoloured and crumbly. Other parts of the body may be affected, typically the groin area, when it is described as 'jock itch' in men. It may be confused with eczema, psoriasis or dermatitis. Or it may be a secondary infection from a more serious condition such as lymphadenitis or cellulitis, especially if the area is red and swollen. I would advise you to see a qualified health practitioner if you have not done so already just to get an accurate diagnosis.

The fungus needs moisture to grow so keep your feet dry, change your socks and shoes (breathable footwear like leather rather than trainers are better) every day. Preferably wear open-toed sandals as the problem is often worse in warm weather. Avoid cross-infection by drying your feet with a hair dryer instead of a towel.

I would recommend cutting down on food and drinks containing refined sugar for a few weeks to see if this helps.

Immune system support is very important in resistance to fungal infections. I have recommended, in previous articles, taking antioxidants such as Vitamins C and E, Beta carotene, Selenium, and Zinc. Carrots, brazil nuts and pumpkin seeds can provide your daily intake of the last three. Echinacea and Turmeric are just two of many effective herbs that support the immune system when taken internally.

Your lymphatic system works closely with your blood circulation to help cleanse toxins from your body and herbalists believe that keeping this system healthy plays a part in keeping your immune system strong and helping to avoid fungal infections like athlete's foot. Nettles, Calendula, Cleavers and many other herbs are lymphatic cleansers.

Drug treatment from your doctor is effective but research has shown that the drug *itraconazole* can cause liver damage.

Externally, a variety of different preparations can be tried to see which suits you best. A lotion containing a few drops of herbal tinctures of Thuja, Calendula, Myrrh and Golden Seal can be applied 3 times a day. Add a few drops of essential oils of Lavender and Tea Tree. In a recent research study in Australia, Tea tree oil was found to be very effective against the fungus that causes athlete's foot. Try Aloe Vera gel with a

small amount of Turmeric (this can stain skin and clothes so take care).
Or a foot salve of oils of St.John's Wort and Calendula with Aloe Vera
gel may also work for you.

In very stubborn cases I suggest you consult a qualified medical herbalist,
as stronger internal and external treatment may be needed.

**It is advisable to consult a qualified health practitioner before taking
herbal remedies.**

Moira Ross

December 2009