

FUNGAL SKIN INFECTIONS

Most people cringe at the thought of having a fungal infection, but in reality we all have many types of fungi that live on our skin all the time. Most of the time these fungi don't cause any problems, but sometimes a fungus will cause an infection.

Q: What are the symptoms of a fungal infection?

A: The symptoms of fungal skin infections include:

- Itchy, red, raised, scaly patches that may blister or ooze. The patches often have sharply-defined edges, and are often redder around the outside with normal skin tone in the center.
- If your scalp or beard is infected, you may develop bald patches.
- If your nails are infected, they can become discolored and thick.

Q. Are there different kinds of fungal infections?

A. Here are the most common fungal infections:

- **Ringworm.** Fungal infections on the body or scalp are sometimes referred to as "ringworm." This is because the rash sometimes appears as a ring, or partial ring. This is a confusing and unnecessarily alarming name because the rash is not caused by a worm.
- **Athlete's Foot** is a fungal infection of the feet and is very common between the toes.
- **Onychomycosis** refers to a fungal infection of the toenail or fingernail.
- **Tinea Versicolor** is a common and harmless fungal infection. It appears on the back, chest, neck, and upper arms as light-colored patches of discolored skin.
- **Tinea Nigra** is a fungal infection caused by specific type of fungi found in the soil of tropical regions. The infection generally occurs in individuals prone to excessive sweating. It appears as slowly expanding brown or black patches on the skin of the palms and/or soles.

Q: How are fungal infections treated?

A: Ringworm, Athlete's Foot and Tinea Versicolor, Tinea Nigra and Tinea Versicolor can usually be treated effectively with topical antifungal medications. Nail infections where the fungi have penetrated the nail bed may require an oral antifungal.

Q: How long does the treatment take to work?

A: Topical medications applied to the skin usually work within 4 weeks. If your infection is severe or does not respond to topical medications, it will usually respond quickly to antifungal pills.

Q: Are fungal infections contagious?

A: Yes, fungal infections on the skin are contagious. They can be passed from one person to the next by direct skin-to-skin contact, or by contact with contaminated items such as combs, unwashed clothing, and shower or pool surfaces. You can also catch ringworm from pets that carry the fungus.

Fungal skin infections are very common, especially among children, but they may affect people of all ages. If you think you may have a type of fungal infection, call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 (Hilton Head) or (843) 705-0840 (Bluffton / Okatie) today to schedule a consultation.