“The human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art.”
Leonardo da Vinci

If our feet could talk they would probably tell tales of travel and adventure. Indeed, it is quite remarkable, that though so small our feet manage to carry our lumbering bodies about. They are an essential part of almost everything we do, from walking, running and dancing to just standing. It is thus very important that we care for our feet, ensure they are properly circulated and take the necessary steps towards healing if they suffer any ailments.

Common foot problems include smelly feet, athlete’s foot, verrucae, corns and infected toenails.
- Smelly feet are usually caused by excessive perspiration and an over-growth of fungi and/or bacteria.
- Athlete’s foot is a fungal infection—also called tinea pedis. It is contagious via direct contact, wet floors and shared footwear.
- Verrucae are flat warts in the sole of the foot. They are forced under the skin and may occur in clusters. The surface is greyish and crumbly, and they may contain small black points that are swollen blood vessels. Verrucae are also contagious via wet floors. Like warts, verrucae will disappear on their own, but this may take up to 2 years.
- Corns are hard skin that builds up on areas of the feet subjected to pressure or friction.
- Infected toenails are commonly the result of a fungal infection, a condition known as onychomycosis. Toenails affected by onychomycosis are often brittle, discoloured or yellow.

In this article we will be discussing one of the most common yet uncomfortable conditions that affect our feet, Athlete’s Foot. Don’t be fooled by the name though, because not only athletes suffer from this infection, anyone who may have come into contact with the fungus can develop what we commonly refer to as Athletes foot.

What is Athletes foot?
Athlete’s foot is one of the most common fungal skin infections. It is caused by a ringworm fungus known as Trichophyton, which thrives in moist and warm environments, prone to mold and mildew. Since it is contagious, exposure of the feet in high-risk areas such as bathrooms, swimming pools, locker rooms, showers, or any damp area makes us susceptible to the fungi that may be thriving therein.

Also known as tinea pedis, Athlete’s Foot affects the feet and more commonly the areas in between the toes. Due to the infection, the skin between the toes often becomes cracked and reddened with frequent scaling or peeling occurring. Various degrees of itching, burning, stinging and blistering of the affected areas may be experienced. Usually the rash remains localized, however, in certain instances, it may spread to the toenails and even other parts of the body, especially when the infection goes untreated.

Interestingly, not everyone that has walked barefoot in fungal thriving environments has ended up having athlete’s foot. So how do we explain this? Why are some people more
prone to developing certain conditions than others? Unani-Tibb offers some useful explanations...

Tibb’s understanding of Athlete’s Foot

Tibb’s concept of Temperament, which can be described as an individual’s uniqueness, offers some answers to the prevalence and occurrence of illness conditions in certain people. According to the principles of Tibb, the temperament of an individual is consistently indicative of the conditions that that person may be predisposed to. Furthermore, Tibb not only takes into consideration temperament, but also the type of lifestyle a person leads. Often, poor lifestyle factors may cause an imbalance within the body, thereby increasing the risk factors associated with illness conditions.

In Tibb, a person that has a dominance of the ‘Sanguinous’ temperament with accompanying lifestyle factors that expose the body to an excess of heating and moistening qualities, will be more susceptible to developing Athlete’s foot because of the perfect environment of moistness and heat/warmth that the body has created for the fungus to thrive in. (For further understanding on Tibb Temperament, visit our website on www.tibb.co.za)

People suffering from Diabetes, HIV/AIDS, Cancer or someone who has an impaired immune system may also be increasingly susceptible to developing fungal infections such as Athlete’s Foot. A Tibb practitioner will take all of these factors into consideration when treating the infection.

**Treatment**

Athlete’s foot can quite easily be treated with the use of antifungal creams or powders. In severe cases, an oral antifungal medication may be required. Treatment is important and should not be delayed because if the fungus causes injury to the skin or enters into the bloodstream, it may lead to a more severe bacterial infection such as cellulitis.

From a Tibb perspective, the physician will not only treat the fungal infection but also advise the patient on healthy lifestyle to prevent the condition from reoccurring and to help strengthen the individual’s immune system.

**General guidelines to prevent Athletes Foot**

- Avoid wearing the same shoes everyday
- Avoid sharing footwear
- Clean and air your shoes regularly
- Bathe the feet daily ensuring that they are dried well
- Avoid sharing towels or using the same towel on unaffected areas
- Wash your hands regularly to avoid infection spreading
- Avoid walking barefoot in high risk areas such as showers or at swimming pools
- Wear cotton socks
- Wear open- toe shoes or shoes that allow your feet to breathe, if you are infected
- Add garlic to your diet as it has antibacterial and antifungal properties
- Ensure that you eat a well-balanced diet