Dear Alice,

Can you tell me the best way to treat jock itch? The infected area is somewhere below and on the sides of the scrotum and the middle portion of the penis. Is it recommended to use hydrogen peroxide to clean the infected area prior to using anti-fungal creams? Thanks.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Tineus cruris, a.k.a., jock itch, is one of several maladies producing irritation in the groin that's the source of prolonged, embarrassing, and not-very-humorous discomfort. Dermatophytes that cause jock itch are mold-like fungi whose idea of a dream home is a moist, confined area of skin. Jock itch primarily affects people, usually men, who provide such accommodations in the form of sweaty crotches. Particularly at risk are folks who frequent public showers and locker rooms, where thriving fungi have their heyday among damp towels, smelly jock straps, and wet floors. Dermatophytes are also responsible for the other common scourges of gym-goers and athletes, such as ringworm and athlete's foot, which sometimes appear concurrently with jock itch.

Keep in mind that itching and rashes in the groin area and especially on the genitals may be the result of something requiring medical attention, such as a yeast infection or sexually transmitted infection (STI). Consult a health care provider for a correct diagnosis because treatments will vary depending on what you have. Having said that, the symptoms of jock itch are:

- **Raised rashes that tend to clear in the center.** The elevated, well-demarcated, and ring-like nature of this rash helps differentiate jock itch from other skin problems. The rash may become dry and scaly at times or, less commonly, develop into oozing and crusting blisters.
- **Itching of the groin, anal area, and/or the portion of the inner thigh immediately adjacent to the groin.** Jock itch sometimes affects the scrotum, but seldom affects the penis.

If you have jock itch, it usually improves within two weeks from the start of treatment, which consists of:

- Wash and thoroughly dry the affected area, especially after workouts. Clean the area using mild soap and warm water. Hydrogen peroxide is not recommended because it
can irritate and worsen the infection. Use drying powders if excessive perspiration is an issue.
- Avoid chafing by wearing loose fitting underwear.
- Apply over-the-counter anti-fungal creams or powders recommended for jock itch. Follow the regimen outlined in the accompanying instructions. Be careful not to over-treat the area, as this can lead to further irritation.
- Avoid anti-bacterial and/or deodorant soaps.

Even if the rash and itching subside, treatment needs to continue for the entire duration recommended in the medication directions. This will ensure that all of the fungus is killed off, thereby preventing a reoccurrence. However, if little or no improvement occurs, or if the infection is/becomes severe, see a health care provider.

Once jock itch improves, you can help prevent its unwelcomed return. Some prevention tips include:

- Wash your workout clothes after each use. Avoid storing damp clothes or towels in enclosed spaces, such as a locker or duffel bag.
- Change your underwear daily, but you may want to do so even more often if you take part in activities that make you sweat.
- If you're particularly susceptible to jock itch, use drying powders after bathing.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing, at least from the waist down.
- If you already have athlete's foot, put on your socks before your underwear so that the fungi from your feet can't hitch a free ride to your groin.

Hope this comforts you. Stay cool!

Alice!

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