Help me heal my dry, cracked, sore, and ugly feet

Dear Alice,

I have deep cracks in the bottom of my feet. I have been using Vaseline at night, but this does not seem to help. Now I have a sore crack at the base of my 7th toe and I am concerned that I have been doing more harm than good by lubricating my feet.

How can I tell if my feet have a fungus problem or a dry skin problem? I assume that the treatment for one would be contraindicated for the other.

Please help. My feet look hideous!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Cracked, dry skin can be caused by various conditions, including general dry skin, allergic reactions, eczema, and other forms of dermatitis. Feet are especially vulnerable to fungal infections because they lack oil producing glands that can inhibit the growth of fungus, and because they tend to be moist and warm ? the perfect environment for funky foot fungi. If you do have athlete's foot, you are right in thinking that petroleum jelly or other moisturizers are doing more harm than good.

Athlete's foot (also known as tinea pedis by docs and jocks) is a fungal infection that can be tricky to diagnose because of its wide range in severity and symptoms. Most often, in mild cases, affected skin thickens and becomes scaly and itchy. As the infection progresses, blisters can form, and skin, especially between the toes, can become cracked and peel. Moreover, cracked skin can be prone to infections. Maintaining dry, clean feet and wearing fresh, dry socks (made of 100 percent cotton or with a synthetic material that wicks away moisture) or open toe shoes will help slow the growth of fungus. An over-the-counter athlete's foot treatment, used as directed, should clear up the problem if it is a fungal infection ? and not make matters worse if it isn't.

If it ultimately comes down to simply soothing dry skin, there are many preventative measures and treatments you can employ. Again, speaking with your health care provider is your best bet. S/he can get to the root of your problem. If it's not athlete's foot, a correct diagnosis is key to taking care of the cracked, dry skin on your feet with the appropriate treatment.
Hope this advice leaves you jumping for joy!

Alice!
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Published date:
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Last reviewed on:
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