

Patient information from BMJ

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Ringworm of the body

Ringworm of the body is a skin infection caused by a fungus. It has nothing to do with worms but gets its name from the ring-shaped rash it causes.

What is ringworm of the body?

You get ringworm of the body if a type of fungus called a dermatophyte infects your skin.

The medical name for this infection is *tinea corporis*. It is closely related to other infections caused by dermatophytes, including:

- athlete's foot (*tinea pedis*)
- jock itch (*tinea cruris*)
- fungal nail infection (onychomycosis), and
- ringworm of the scalp (*tinea capitis*).

You can pick up the fungus in several ways, including:

- through close contact with someone who has the infection
- through touching personal items, such as towels or bedding
- from contact with an infected animal. Dogs, cats, and some farm animals, such as cows, can get ringworm.

Ringworm of the body tends to affect smooth patches of skin without much hair on them. It's more common in children than in adults.

What are the symptoms?

Ringworm usually starts as a red, scaly spot. This spreads outwards over time. The rash is often itchy. The centre of the rash may start to clear up, making a ring shape. This is how ringworm gets its name.

You may get one patch of ringworm or several. They sometimes overlap to make a pattern like the petals of a flower.

What treatments work?

An antifungal cream will cure ringworm for most people. Many of these creams are available over the counter. There are also things you can do to reduce the risk of spreading ringworm to others, and to stop it coming back.

Treatments for ringworm

You can buy several antifungal creams from a pharmacist. Some creams are not suitable for younger children. You can ask your pharmacist whether a particular product is right for you or your child. If over-the-counter creams don't help, your doctor may prescribe a stronger cream.

Ringworm starts to clear up for most people when they use an antifungal cream. It's important to follow the instructions that come with your treatment.

You will probably need to apply the cream once or twice a day, and keep using it for a while after the rash has disappeared. If your rash doesn't start to improve after using a cream for a week or two, see your doctor.

Some people get skin irritation from the creams, but this isn't common.

Stopping ringworm spreading or coming back

If you or your child has ringworm, keep the skin around the infection clean and dry. Ringworm can be itchy, but try not to scratch. Scratching could break the skin and cause another infection, or you could spread the fungus around your body on your fingers.

The fungus that causes ringworm thrives in warm, damp environments. So try to wear loose-fitting clothes and avoid fabrics that hold in moisture.

If you have athlete's foot as well as ringworm, treat both infections at the same time. Fungus from your feet can spread to other parts of your body and give you ringworm again.

To avoid spreading the infection to other people, make sure you wash your hands frequently. Also, don't share personal items such as towels, clothes, and bedding, and wash these items regularly.

If you think a pet has ringworm, take it to the vet. Ringworm on animals usually looks like a bald patch on their fur. If you don't have your pet treated, you could catch ringworm again.

What will happen?

Ringworm can be cured with treatment. But without treatment, the infection can last a long time. It can also spread to other parts of your body, or to other people. If you have any questions or concerns about ringworm or its treatment, talk to your doctor.

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