

# Well

Tara Parker-Pope on Health



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## Remedies: Garlic for Athlete's Foot

By [ANAHAD O'CONNOR](#)



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times What alternative remedies belong in your home medicine cabinet?

*More than a third of American adults use some form of complementary or alternative medicine, [according to a government report](#). Natural remedies have an obvious appeal, but how do you know which ones to choose and whether the claims are backed by science? In this occasional series, Anahad O'Connor, the New York Times "Really?" columnist, explores the claims and the science behind alternative remedies that you may want to consider for your family medicine cabinet.*

**The Remedy:** Garlic.

**The Claim:** It can treat athlete's foot.

**The Science:** You don't have to be much of an athlete to contract athlete's foot. All it takes is a step on a moist floor or a moment in a gym locker room to end up with the pesky and widespread fungus, which causes flaking and tiny cracks between the toes that sting as much as paper cuts.

Treating tinea pedis, as it is known scientifically, can be just as irritating. Those who have it often experiment with all sorts of creams, sprays, gels and prescription drugs that have varying success rates. And the condition has a notorious habit of returning, in part because the fungus often lingers even after symptoms subside,

causing many people to end their treatments before the fungus has been completely extinguished.

But one alternative remedy that a small number of studies support is garlic, widely used throughout history for its antimicrobial properties. In particular, studies have looked at a compound in garlic known as “ajoene,” which gets its name from “ajo,” the word for garlic in Spanish. The compound seems to be especially effective against the fungus that causes athlete’s foot.

“Garlic has long been considered a powerful natural antifungal,” said Dr. Lawrence D. Rosen, chief of pediatric integrative medicine at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey and a pediatrician at the Whole Child Center in nearby Oradell. Dr. Rosen pointed out that studies have found garlic effective against a number of fungal infections, [including those caused by Candida and other common pathogens](#).

Tinea pedis seems to be just as vulnerable. In 2000, one team of researchers published [a study in The Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology](#) that compared a week of twice-daily applications of mild garlic solutions with topical applications of the popular drug Lamisil in about 50 people with diagnoses of athlete’s foot. Two months later, the scientists found that a garlic solution that contained about 1 percent ajoene had a 100 percent cure rate, compared with a 94 percent cure rate for 1 percent Lamisil. Other studies have found similar results.

Ajoene creams and solutions are not available commercially. But some experts recommend simply adding a few finely crushed cloves of garlic to a foot bath and soaking the affected foot for 30 minutes, or mincing a few garlic cloves, mixing the minced garlic with olive oil, and then using a cotton ball to rub some of the solution on the affected area.

**The Risks:** [According to the American Academy of Family Physicians](#), side effects of garlic are generally mild and uncommon. But some people can develop allergic rashes or blisters with topical use.

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