

# Skin Infections Prevention

With the season rapidly approaching we wanted to share our prevention tips.

Here is our list of prevention tips. Hope it helps.

We all know that wrestlers and fighters are special athletes. Along with being special athletes come special needs. Staying healthy and free from infections is one of these needs.

The most important step we can take toward preventing and curing skin infections is to educate ourselves. Once we are properly educated we can begin to lay a solid foundation, brick by brick, for healthy, infection tolerant skin.

Skin infections are caused by three different sources:

1. Fungus (most common is Tinea)  
--Causes ringworm, jock itch, athlete's foot, and infected nails
2. Bacteria  
--Causes Staph, impetigo and MRSA
3. Virus  
--Causes Herpes and warts

Our skin surface is made up of our own unique balance of these three sources. This is called our normal flora. When our flora is out of balance and/or our skin becomes damaged. These sources have a chance to become infections.

Showering immediately after practice sounds like a simple enough way to prevent skin infections, but did you know that if you go straight to the shower and use an antibacterial soap only, you are promoting the growth of fungal infections?

--Antibacterial soaps do just what they state- they kill bacteria. This is great when we want to protect ourselves from just bacterial infections. This is not great when we are also exposed to fungal and viral infections.

--Antibacterial soaps strip away the bacteria that keep the balance of our normal flora leaving behind fungal and viral infections to flourish. The bacterium on your skin are needed to compete for space with the fungi to create your normal flora.

--Antibacterial soaps commonly use Triclosan as their active ingredient. Triclosan is an FDA approved pesticide that some studies show is absorbed through our skin.

Showering tips for wrestlers and fighters:

--Do not lather directly under the flow of water. Allow soap to remain on skin momentarily.

--Use a loofa (mesh sponge) but not too vigorously. Vigorous scrubbing will cause small abrasions to the surface of the skin allowing penetration by the sources of infection.

--Wash the back of the neck and hairline thoroughly. The Collar Tie is responsible for the over abundance of skin infections found here. Our hands touch everything in the wrestling room including the mats, our bodies, our opponent's body and anything else you might pick up. Everything collected by our hands is transferred to the back of our opponent's neck. Wash this area twice.

--Wear shower shoes. Athlete's foot is caused by the same Tinea (fungus) that causes ringworm.

--Do not share towels and wash towels after each use.

--Dry off thoroughly.

--Wear loose fitting clothes to allow your skin to breath.

We also need to protect ourselves on the mats. We all know that the mats are a battlefield. They are a place we go to compete or to train and prepare for competition. Part of this preparation and training should include proper hygiene. Here are a few tips that can help in the room.

--Carry your shoes to practice. When leaving the room for water or bathroom breaks wipe your shoes before entering back into the room. Shoes can be wiped on a towel dampened with solution from your bucket of mat cleaner. Wet the towel in the bucket before cleaning the mats.

--Change your shirt often during practice. Once a shirt becomes soaked in sweat it becomes permeable. Your sweat becomes a vehicle for infections to pass through your clothing and onto your skin.

--Wear a thick cotton t-shirt or clothing made of synthetic fibers that "wick" the sweat away from the body, helping to keep the skin dry.

--When sitting on the wall do not play with the mats. Wrestlers often lean with their backs against the wall with their hands at their sides touching the edges of the mats along the wall. Take a look at what is in between the wall and the edge of the mat. When was the last time this area was cleaned and when was the last time your wall mats were cleaned?

--Do not train with partners who have skin infections and do not train if you yourself are infected.

--Cover and treat any trauma to the skin including, cuts, scrapes, and new tattoos. New tattoos are the product of the skin being pierced literally thousands of times. Always apply an antibiotic ointment or healing slave before covering for added protection. Of course this is going to fall off during training and will have to be recovered.

--When leaving the room always, always, always, consider yourself contaminated-because you are. Shower immediately and properly. If a shower is not available use a body wipe to hold you over until you can shower.

Having a clean room is also a necessity but a clean room is more than just mopping the mats. There are many more surfaces that we come in contact with other than floor mats.

Consider cleaning the following:

--Wall mats.

--Takedown dummies. (Remove the clothing and launder it and wipe down vinyl surfaces.)

--Throw dummies.

--Crash pads or throw mats.

--Fungi like to live in damp and dark places. Make your room light and dry. A dehumidifier can pull moisture out of your room.

Battling skin infections is more than just topical. Diet can play a huge role in how healthy our skin is and healthy skin is harder to infect. Here are a few diet and skin care tips:

--Keep your blood sugars under control. Aim for blood sugars of 80 mg/dl to 120 mg/dl before meals, and 100 mg/dl to 140 mg/dl at bedtime.

--Keep your Hemoglobin A1c at 7% or less (a 3 month average blood sugar test). This prevents dry skin.

--Drink eight glasses of water a day. Of course when cutting weight we all would love to have eight glasses of water however we just cannot do this. Applying lotion to the skin will help keep it moist.

--Eat whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and small amounts of lean protein rather than sugary or fat laden foods. Keep a balanced diet even when cutting back.

--Rest to increase your body's resistance. You will catch infections easier if you are worn down.

Once infected, proper care is required to rid you of the infection and promote healing.

--Do not touch the infection. Wash your hands immediately if you do touch an infection.

--Consult your trainer or physician with all possible infections. The sooner you treat an infection the less established it will be. The infection will be easier to clear up, creating less damage to the skin.

--Use medicine completely and as recommended. The infection may still be present even though it may not be visible.

--Use the proper medication for each infection. Using the wrong medicine may make the infection worse. An example of this is using cortisone creams on fungal infections which help fungus grow.

Many of us train for hours a day for competition, some are coaches and some just want to stay in shape. Whatever reason we have to be on the mat or in the ring, we all share the common threat of skin infections. Preventing, treating and curing skin infections can be made easier with a little education on the topic.

Gus Sako

Defense Soap