

Summer Olympic athletes must overcome skin conditions to reach for the gold

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The Olympics are all about the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." But for many Summer Games athletes, there's also the agony of skin irritations and conditions that can make the journey to the medal stand more difficult.

Skin problems rank among athletes' most common complaints, but there's little information available regarding dermatoses among Olympic [athletes](#), according to findings from Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center.

And who would know better than an Olympic medalist turned physician?

Jacqueline F. De Luca, M.D., a resident in the dermatology department at Wake Forest Baptist, was a member of the U.S. women's water polo team that won a bronze medal at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece.

During a research fellowship at Wake Forest Baptist under the guidance of dermatologist Gil Yosipovitch, M.D., De Luca and colleagues conducted a comprehensive review of available literature and found little regarding sports-related dermatoses among Olympic athletes.

An article summarizing the team's findings is published in the April issue of the journal *Sports Medicine*.

"Dermatological conditions are an increasing cause of medical problems

for Olympic athletes and can be harmful and even prohibitive for competition, but our review did not find a wealth of medical literature in this area," De Luca said. "This is unfortunate because although most athletes present with many common and easily identifiable dermatoses, rarer sports-related conditions also exist that may confound some physicians and create the potential for misdiagnosis and unnecessary procedures."

De Luca said that early [correct diagnosis](#) is imperative for the athletes "to both participate and compete to their full potential."

The researchers reviewed sports-related [skin](#) ailments by general categories of Olympic sport: endurance ([marathon runners](#), triathletes, cyclists, long-distance swimmers), resistance (boxing, judo, weight lifting, wrestling), team sport (basketball, beach volleyball, tennis, soccer, water polo), and performing arts (diving, gymnastics, synchronized swimming).

Co-author Brian Adams, M.D., who runs a dermatology clinic for athletes at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, said Summer Games athletes can be afflicted by a range of dermatoses, from the easy-to-treat rashes, calluses or blisters, to the more severe and complex conditions such as skin cancers and infectious skin diseases. Some infectious skin diseases can become epidemic among a team, creating significant disruption of team activities and performance, he added. Adams was commissioned by the International Olympic Committee to contribute to its sports textbook, "The Olympic Textbook of Medicine in Sport."

"The extreme nature of their training, and their constant environmental exposures to heat, sweat, trauma, sun and other factors, can lead to health issues that affect their performance ability. That's true for all athletes," Adams said. "The upcoming summer Olympics is a great

opportunity to highlight the skin issues that can afflict athletes everywhere."

The London 2012 summer games will see hundreds of athletes participating in 26 different sports from July 27 through Aug. 12.

Provided by Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center

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