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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DERMATOLOGISTS WARN FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS:
DON'T LET EXERCISE-RELATED SKIN PROBLEMS OUTWEIGH THE
BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

NEW YORK (Nov. 8, 2007) – The changing of the season brings cooler weather, shorter days and more people heading to health clubs for a healthy dose of indoor exercise. While experts agree that exercise is one of the most beneficial activities a person can do to improve one's overall health, dermatologists want gym goers to be aware of the hidden dangers of exercise – bothersome skin conditions that can be painful and inhibit further physical activity if left untreated.

In recognition of National Healthy Skin Month, dermatologist Brian B. Adams, MD, MPH, FAAD, associate professor of dermatology at the University of Cincinnati and director of dermatology at the Veterans Administration Medical Center, both in Cincinnati, Ohio, spoke today at the American Academy of Dermatology's (Academy) *skin* academy on the most common skin conditions to which people who engage in regular indoor exercise are susceptible and how to treat them.

“Despite its positive effect on a person's physical and psychological health, regular exercise does not necessarily improve our skin health and may in fact lead to a rash of skin conditions that require treatment,” said Dr. Adams. “While exercising indoors eliminates the threat of skin cancer and sun damage, it is important for people who frequent health clubs to be aware of the risks to their skin as well.”

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Blisters

Blisters form when friction between an area of the body and athletic equipment causes a splitting of the top layer of skin, allowing fluid build-up. Runners and those who routinely lift weights often develop blisters. Dr. Adams suggests that the key to preventing blisters is to reduce friction by creating more distance from the equipment to the skin.

“Wearing moisture-wicking socks, applying a thin layer of petroleum jelly between the sock and the shoe, and using gloves to lift weights can help prevent blisters from forming,” said Dr. Adams. “Also, there is no better dressing for blisters than your own skin, so you should not peel off the top layer of a blister. If it comes off, keep the blister covered with petroleum jelly and a bandage.”

While blisters normally do not become infected, Dr. Adams cautioned that redness appearing on the skin in the vicinity of the blister could indicate an infection and should be treated by a dermatologist.

Fungus/Athlete’s Foot

Unfortunately, health clubs are breeding grounds for all kinds of fungus – from swimming pool floors and diving boards to showers and locker rooms. The most common contagious fungal infection that exercise enthusiasts are prone to developing is tinea pedis, or athlete’s foot. This fungus grows best in dark, moist and warm environments, making sweaty feet tucked inside running shoes perfect targets.

Perhaps the most bothersome symptom of athlete’s foot is the itching and burning sensation people feel on their feet. In some individuals, the skin between the toes peels, cracks and scales, while others may experience redness, scaling or dryness on the soles and along the sides of the feet. Some people who develop athlete’s foot also may be at risk for toenail fungus, which can be difficult to treat without dermatologic care.

“The best defense against athlete’s foot is to never go barefoot in a health club,” advised Dr. Adams. “Wear shoes, socks, sandals or aquatic shoes at all times.”

Dr. Adams added that most cases of athlete's foot respond well to over-the-counter medications, but persistent or recurring infections will require prescription-strength medications from a dermatologist.

Acne Mechanica

Regular exercisers also may be susceptible to acne mechanica, a form of acne that can occur under athletic equipment or tight-fitting clothing. Acne mechanica typically develops in warm, moist environments – especially areas prone to friction. Wearing tight-fitting exercise shorts made of non-breathable fabrics can even cause an acne flare-up on the buttocks.

“Changing your workout attire by eliminating tight-fighting clothing and adding more breathable, moisture-wicking fabrics can help prevent acne mechanica,” said Dr. Adams. “If these preventive measures are not working, your dermatologist can prescribe prescription medications that are effective in treating this type of acne.”

Turf Burns

Originally termed for outdoor athletes, turf burns (or road rash) are nasty abrasions that can occur on an area of the body – usually the arms or legs – if athletic padding is not used. Most cases of indoor turf burns are caused by sliding on the basketball court or from constant contact with exercise mats or carpet.

“For the quickest healing and to avoid scarring, turf burns need to be cleaned and covered with petroleum jelly and a bandage,” said Dr. Adams. “If there are any signs of an infection or it doesn't seem to be healing properly, see your dermatologist.”

Indoor Tanning: Take a Pass

Unfortunately, not everything in a health club is “healthy.” Perhaps the biggest health threat is indoor tanning devices, which are still offered at some health clubs across the country despite their link to skin cancer. Ultraviolet light, whether from natural sunlight or artificial light sources, increases a person's risk of developing skin cancer.

In September 2007, President Bush signed the Tanning Accountability and Notification Act (TAN Act) into law, which calls for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine if the current language and positioning of warning labels on indoor tanning devices is adequate to effectively warn consumers of the known dangers of indoor tanning – including the risk of skin cancer.

“As dermatologists, we see the serious health consequences skin cancer poses for patients every day,” said Dr. Adams. “There is absolutely nothing healthy about indoor tanning that should allow it to be offered to health club patrons, who are in some cases being misled to think that this form of UV-exposure is safe and that a tan is somehow healthy. Hopefully this new law will force health clubs to re-examine their choice about offering a disservice like indoor tanning to their patrons.”

In addition, Dr. Adams offered these sun-safety tips for outdoor fitness buffs:

- If possible, seek shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when UV rays are the strongest.
- Runners and those engaging in other outdoor sports should wear broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher and reapply frequently when sweating. Stash sunscreen in your pockets as a reminder to reapply and wear dark-colored clothing which has built-in SPF, if possible. Hats should always be worn, and men should never run with their shirts off.
- Skiers should be aware that snow is 80 percent reflective, even in shaded areas, and skiers are more likely to burn at higher altitudes.

“Being aware of the skin problems that can arise from indoor or outdoor exercise is a crucial first step in keeping your skin healthy and getting the most out of your workouts,” said Dr. Adams. “If you have a concern about your skin, whether or not it’s related to exercise, it’s important to see a dermatologist for diagnosis and treatment.”

Headquartered in Schaumburg, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology (Academy), founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 15,000 physicians worldwide, the Academy is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin, hair and nails. For more information, contact the Academy at 1-888-462-DERM (3376) or www.aad.org.

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