

At one time or another, most athletes get shin splints - also called tibial stress syndrome. This is another very common running injury, and typically runners at risk for shin splints are new to the sport. These runners have not acclimated to the stresses of running yet, and they may not have been stretching enough or doing it incorrectly.

Shin splints aren't really a single medical condition, but they are just a symptom of an underlying problem. The term "shin splints" is a very wide used phrase and can refer to several lower leg injuries. It occurs when there is inflammation of the muscle attachments and the membranes covering the tibia (shin bone) on the inside of the front of the lower leg.

What does it feel like: There is dull, aching pain or tenderness along the inside of the shin, usually about halfway down the shin. The area may even be painful to the touch. The pain is most severe at the start of a run, but may disappear during the run, as the muscles loosen up. This is different to a stress fracture, where there is pain during the weight bearing activities.

What causes it: The usual mechanical factors seen are an imbalance between the posterior and anterior muscles groups of the legs. If the posterior muscles are too tight, they will force the anterior muscles to work harder and longer. Overtraining is also a key factor, or a rapid increase in training load or intensity. Improper shoes with inadequate shock protection, overpronation of the feet, and excessive running on hard surfaces, such as concrete may also contribute to developing shin splints.

What you can do: Decrease training immediately. Do not run if pain occurs during or following a run. Non-weight bearing exercises may be necessary. Rest your legs and apply ice packs to the shin area as needed. Start gentle stretches to the calf muscles and the hamstrings. Shoes with too many miles on them should be replaced, and you may even consider getting orthotic inserts. (If you are a consistent runner, buy new shoes after about 500 miles of use). Return to running gradually. The goal is to find the distance which can be run, if any, that does not produce symptoms. Don't forget to stretch before and after a run. Also, try to avoid downhill running which can aggravate the problem. Most of all, do not run on concrete!

If the injury is getting worse, which could be a sign of a stress fracture, consult a physician. Also, a Physical Therapist can teach you the proper exercises to stretch the posterior muscles in the legs and strengthen the ankle and shin muscle. In addition, the Physical Therapist can evaluate your shoes and advise you on the potential need of corrective orthotics.

In the newsletter, we will wrap up "The Big 5" - the 5 most common running injuries. Don't go away!

www.time-to-run.com/injuries/thebig5/index.htm

www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/shin-splints

www.drpricut.com/sports.html

The health information contained herein is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace discussions with a healthcare provider. Decisions regarding patient care must be made with a healthcare provider, considering the unique characteristics of the patient.

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