

# RUNNER'S WORLD

WORLD'S LEADING  
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## ASK THE EXPERTS

### LOWER-LEG PAIN

## Make It Stop

I've been a runner for several years, but I've recently found that soon after I start running, my calves tighten, my shins hurt, and my feet get numb. I've tried wearing different shoes and tying my shoelaces looser, but nothing has worked. What can I do?

—J.P., Albuquerque, N.Mex.

It's possible this is a simple case of doing too much too soon. However, your particular combination of tight calves, shin pain, and numbness makes me suspect a condition called exertional compartment syndrome (ECS). It often affects more seasoned runners. ECS is treatable, but it's first important to get properly diagnosed.

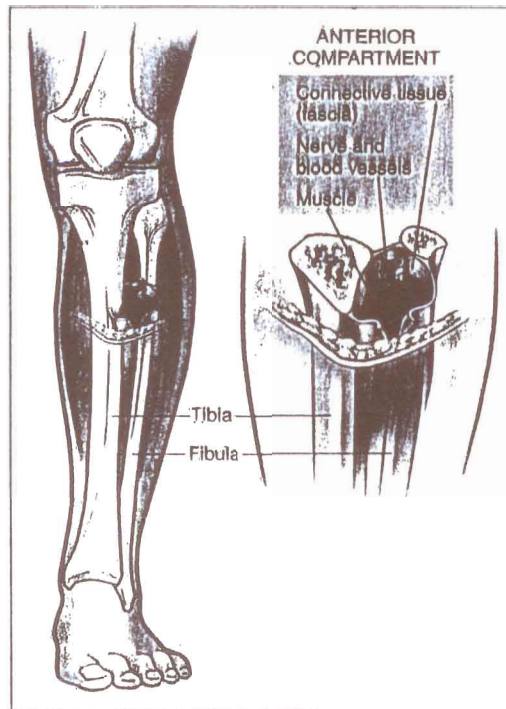
ECS happens when lower-leg muscles swell with blood and fluid during exercise. This causes the muscle covering (fascia) to tighten, and puts pressure on nerves within the muscle compartments. The symptoms of ECS can range from a dull leg ache to sharp pain, but runners typically feel tightness, numbness, or weakness in the foot or leg. Also, the symptoms normally improve soon after you stop running.

I suggest you see a sports physician to rule out other problems and to confirm the ECS diagnosis. The doctor may order x-rays or a bone scan to check for stress fractures. But the definitive test for ECS involves a procedure that checks pressure

in the muscle compartment both before and after you run.

Stretching, orthotics, new running shoes, soft-tissue massage, and physical therapy are conservative remedies. Advanced cases are treated by making a surgical slit through the fascia, which relieves the pressure (and thus the pain and numbness). Recovery from this procedure can take up to 6 weeks.

—Richard T. Braver, D.P.M., sports podiatrist in Englewood and Fairlawn, N.J., and member of the RW Science Advisory Board



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