



ADVICE

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INJURY PREVENTION

TAKING IT ON THE SHIN

The name certainly is evocative, because shinsplints can feel like splintered shins. "The term is actually a catch-all for several different conditions, which all can have a variety of causes," says Richard Braver, D.P.M., of Foot-Wise Sports Medicine in Englewood, New Jersey. And shinsplints are not for novices only. "We see shinsplints in elite and beginning runners alike," Dr. Braver says.

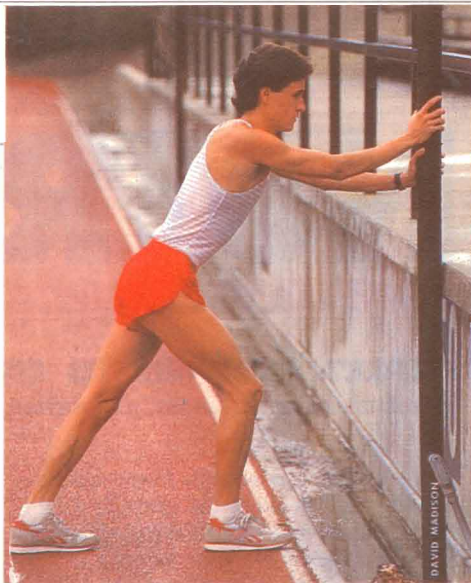
Usually the condition (experienced as throbbing pain about midway down the front of the lower leg) is the result of inflammation of the thin sheathing (periosteum) that wraps around the tibia, or shin bone. But it can be caused by injury to the muscles that run along the tibia, by inflammation of the tendons that attach these muscles to the tibia, or in some cases even by a stress fracture of that bone.

"This is why it's important to identify the cause of shinsplints before attempting treatment," Dr. Braver says. "Sometimes it's too much speedwork, too much hill work, insufficient stretching of the calf muscles or just plain overtraining. Even something as simple as worn or improperly fitting shoes can cause shin pain," Dr. Braver says.

If you suffer from chronic pain, see a sports podiatrist who understands running and can help you get at the cause of your shinsplints. If you get shinsplints only occasionally, however, you should be able to treat them yourself.

"Rest is step number one," says Dr. Braver. Then he recommends three days off, during which ice should be applied to the injured area for about 10 minutes two or three times a day. As you gradually continue running, apply moist heat before each run, and ice afterward. Also, do some gentle calf stretching during this recovery period—the best time being a mile or so into your run, when calf muscles are warm and pliable enough for stretching to have maximum effect.

And if pain still persists? "Then a stress fracture could be the cause, which only an x-ray or bone scan can detect," Dr. Braver says. "If you experience pain even while walking, chances are this is the problem."—Porter Shimer



Don't push it: Rest is priority one when you get shinsplints, and gentle calf stretching helps, too.

RUNNING SURFACES

WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO SHAME

Q: I am in prison and must run on hard streets that were built to accommodate heavy military equipment. Since this is the only surface I run on, I am curious as to the long-term effect this will have on my feet and legs.
J.S., Fort Dix, New Jersey

A: If you have good running shoes and don't run superhigh mileage, you should have no long-term problems. With the advancements in shoe technology, runners today have fewer hard-surface worries than in previous years. In your case, make sure your shoes are supportive yet well-cushioned. If you're heavier than average, go for shoes with firm midsoles, as soft ones won't provide adequate shock absorption.

Proper running form also affects shock absorption. Good knee lift ensures a longer stride, which in turn brings about proper heel-toe action. Result: better shock absorption. (Short striding will often cause the ball of the foot to slap down on the ground, which cuts down on shock absorption.) Also, avoid sharp turns while running on those hard streets. The turns put stresses on your body that are distributed unequally throughout the joints.

Finally, the longer the distance, the more cumulative are the stresses put on the body. By keeping your mileage moderate, you'll be able to keep running healthfully.

—Richard Braver, D.P.M., runner and head of Foot-Wise Sports Medicine, Englewood, New Jersey

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