

Shin Splints

“Shin splints” is a term used for pain in the area in front of the tibia or shinbone, the large bone in the calf. Shin splints are a result of excess stress on the tissues around the shinbone and are common in people who do a lot of running. They are considered an “overuse injury.” You are more likely to get shin splints if you run on a slanted surface, run in poor footwear, or do lots of sudden starts and stops. Shin splints are also more likely to occur when you are starting or increasing your running or when you have flat or rigid feet.

Symptoms

Shin splints cause soreness or pain along the inner side of the calf or shin during running, sometimes with mild swelling. Certain symptoms should always prompt an evaluation by a medical professional: the pain follows an injury, the shin is hot and inflamed, the pain persists during rest or is getting progressively worse.

Diagnosis

Shin splints are usually diagnosed by symptom review and physical examination. Sometimes x-rays or other imaging tests are used to look for tiny stress fractures in the bone.

Treatment

Shin splints usually heal with conservative treatment:

- Rest the inflamed area. Avoid activities that cause pain and substitute other exercise instead. For example, reduce or eliminate running for a while, and swim or bike instead
- Ice the area. Wrap ice packs in a thin layer of fabric and apply for 15 minutes every two hours or so.
- Elevate the area. This helps to reduce swelling. Raise the shin above the level of your heart while resting or sleeping
- Check your shoes. Make sure they are not worn out, they fit properly, and have the right amount of support, especially in the arch.
- Use ibuprofen, naproxen, or acetaminophen (all over the counter) for a few days to reduce pain; do not, however, try to mask the pain so you can continue to run and make the inflammation worse!
- Strengthen the muscles of your lower legs. Toe raises are an example – while standing, rise up onto your toes and lower your heels to the floor. While sitting, try writing the alphabet in the air with the tip of your big toe.
- When you are feeling better, return to your running gradually. This is important. Do cross-training to maintain fitness and slowly build up your running. If you start to feel the pain again, take a break.

10/12, 11/13, 11/15