



WELLNESS

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PREVENTING COMMON RUNNING INJURIES



Running is a great way to get in shape, but it can also lead to injuries. Knowing about common injuries and how to prevent them can keep you on track toward reaching your fitness goals.

RUNNING RIGHT

Experts recommend the following strategies to prevent injuries:

- **Identify your running goals.** You may choose to start running to improve your figure, lose weight, increase cardiovascular fitness, or socialize with friends. Whatever the reason, it's a good idea to identify this goal when creating your exercise program. If you want to improve cardiovascular fitness, for instance, you should run at a quick pace to maximize your heart rate. If you're running to lose weight or reduce body fat, it's better to run at a slower rate for a longer time. Depending on your goal, your healthcare provider or personal trainer may decide that a modest walking or jogging program is appropriate. Setting goals helps you follow a safe pace and keeps you from overexertion, which can result in injury.
- **Have a physical evaluation.** Certain health problems may hamper your running performance and increase your risk for injury. Specifically, osteoporosis, arthritis, and other degenerative joint diseases can increase your injury risk. If you have any significant health issues, you should discuss these with your provider before you start to run.
- **Warm up before you run and stretch after you run.** Doing so can prevent some of the most common injuries. It's most important to stretch muscles that move your leg and ankle joints. These include the calf muscle, which moves the knee and ankle, and the hamstring, which moves the knee and hip. Walk or gently jog for 5 minutes. Cool down at the same pace for another 5 minutes at the end of your run.
- **Wear the correct shoes.** Buy running shoes at an athletic store, where a salesclerk can help you choose a shoe that fits your foot type. This can help prevent injuries.

COMMON RUNNING INJURIES

SHIN SPLINTS

a.k.a. medial tibial stress syndrome

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

A nagging pain concentrated in the front or outside of your leg along the shin bone (tibia); it usually pops up during and after exercise and when you press on the affected area on the lower leg.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Repetitive stress on the shinbone and the connective tissues causes inflammation of the muscle, generally because of overuse or poor conditioning. (i.e. upping your mileage too quickly, overstriding or running on hard surfaces).

THE FIX:

Protect yourself by strengthening your feet, ankles, calves, and hips, which support your shins with specific exercises. And learn to control the eccentric deceleration of your foot to the ground: Loop a mini band around your feet and step feet apart until you feel resistance on the band. Flex one foot so toes lift up off the ground, then slowly lower toes back to the ground. Do 3 sets of 10 reps on each foot.

BLISTERS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

A burning sensation that may be accompanied by pain, redness, or itching.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Friction, usually caused by your shoes or socks rubbing against your skin; anything that intensifies rubbing can start a blister, including a faster pace, poor-fitting shoes, and foot abnormalities such as bunions, heel spurs, and hammertoes.

THE FIX:

Drain the blister using a sterilized needle, then cover with a tight, clean bandage; wear synthetic, moisture-wicking socks to avoid blisters in the future.

PLANTAR FASCITIS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

A sharp stab or deep ache in the heel or along the arch of the foot, especially in the morning, after sitting for long periods of time, or during the push-off phase of your gait.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Drastic or sudden increases in mileage, poor foot structure or overpronation, tight calves, excessive uphill running, and inappropriate running shoes can overload the plantar fascia (the connective tissue that runs from your heel to the base of your toes); that stress can cause inflammation in the plantar fascia.

THE FIX:

Strengthen the foot muscles, specifically in the arch, with toe yoga: Remove your socks and shoes and stand tall on both feet. Splay your toes and feet out so weight is distributed evenly. While keeping toes two to five down, lift just your big toe. Hold for 2 seconds while keeping the small toes relaxed. Lower and repeat 20 times. Then switch and keep your big toe down while lifting toes two to five up. Try not to let the foot pronate (roll inward) on this one. Hold for 2 seconds. Lower and repeat 20 times.

ACHILLES TENDONITIS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

Dull, nagging, or sharp pain anywhere along the back of the tendon but usually close to the heel; you may notice limited ankle flexibility.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Tight or fatigued calf muscles (from not stretching properly, increasing mileage too quickly, or overtraining) transfer too much of the burden of running to the Achilles; under too much stress, the tendon tightens and is overworked, which causes inflammation.

THE FIX:

Stretching can help prevent this injury. Perform isometric calf raises for pain relief, then eccentric calf raises to build strength: Place toes on a raised stair or step and let heels hang off. Shift the majority of your weight on one side, lift onto your toes, keeping the crease of the ankle joint in line with the second toe, and hold that position for 10 seconds. Repeat five times, then repeat on the other side. Then lift both heels and lower one foot slowly until heel drops below the stair or step; do 3 sets of 10 reps on each leg.

RUNNER'S KNEE

a.k.a. patellofemoral pain syndrome

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

Aching pain around or behind the knee cap, especially when running downstairs or descending steep hills.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Abnormal mechanics caused by problems up- or downstream from the knee—think: weak posterior hip muscles, like the gluteus medius—rotate the leg inward, forcing the patella to bump against the femoral groove; this is exacerbated by overuse.

THE FIX:

Activate your glutes and relearn hip extension with grasshopper exercises: Lie on stomach and rest chin on hands. Spread knees apart as far as you can on the floor and bring toes together in the air so both sets of toes are pointing up at the ceiling. Lift thighs up off the ground as high as you can (it will only be a few inches, max), while keeping torso on the ground. Lower back down. Do 3 sets of 15 reps.

FOOT PAIN

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE:

Irritation on the top of your foot, or a sharp pain that shoots up through your foot into your toes.

WHY IT HAPPENS:

Shoes that are too small or too tight around the forefoot cause irritation on the top of the foot or neuromas, inflamed or swollen nerves near the metatarsals.

THE FIX:

Loosen your laces or look for shoes with a wider toe-box for more room in the forefoot and use Yoga Toes to stretch and separate your toes out of that crunched position.