Shin Splints

Shin splints is a painful problem that is felt on the front of your lower leg. The pain may develop after demanding exercise or sports. Repetitive physical activities may lead to *inflammation* (the body's way of reacting to injury and/or infection) of the muscles that cover the shinbone,. The inflammation will result in pain. The pain can be felt right on the shinbone or the muscles on its either side. Shin splints most often happen in dancers, runners, military people and those with flat feet.

CAUSES

Shin splints are caused by overuse and activities done over and over again (*repetitive*). Activities that could contribute to getting this problem include:

- Sudden increase in exercise time.
- Starting new demanding activity.
- Running up hills or long distances.
- Poor warm- up.
- Military training.
- Shoes that fit poorly.

Shin splints can be due to other causes, such as a tiny bone crack caused by overuse (*stress fracture*).

SYMPTOMS

- The main symptom of shin splints is pain on the front of the leg. The location and severity of the pain may vary.
- You may have pain while exercising or at rest.
- An aching pain may persist even after stopping the activity.
- You may also have tight and stiff calf muscles.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis may be made from the history of your symptoms and an exam. You may be observed as you walk or run. X-rays and/or further testing may be needed to rule out other problems.

TREATMENT

Your caregiver may decide on the treatment based on your age, history, health and how bad the pain is. Most cases of shin splints can be managed by one or more of the following measures:

- Rest.
- Stopping the activity that causes shin pain.
- Medicines to control the inflammation as directed by your caregiver.
- Ice packs, massage, stretching and strengthening as part of a physical therapy program.
- For those who jog/run, shoes with rigid heels and a good arch support may be needed.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow the activity and medication instructions from your caregiver.
- Resume activity steadily.
- Wear shoes which have proper padding and support.
- Reduce the length and intensity of your exercise.
- Restart your exercise sessions with non-weight bearing exercises, such as cycling or swimming.
- Stop running if the pain returns.
- Warm up properly before exercising.
- For those who jog/run, the following may be helpful:
  - Run on a level, fairly firm surface.

- If changing intensity and/or terrain, try to do so gradually.
- Limit increases in distance run by no more than 5-10% weekly.
- Proper nutrition and calcium intake (1,500mg/day for female athletes) is important.
- Consider using a multi-vitamin with vitamin D.
- Footwear with enough shock absorption may be helpful.
- Running shoes should be changed every 6 months to 350-450 miles.
- You may need to be seen by a specialist if shoe orthotics are needed.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Symptoms continue or worsen even after following treatments and recommendations above.
- The location, intensity and/or type of pain changes over time.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have severe pain.
- You have trouble walking.

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