Shin Splints (Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome)

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Shin splints are somewhat of a generic term for pain in the tibia, or shin bone. Typically, runners are most commonly affected, but it can occur in any repetitive impact sport. Other causes of leg pain are covered in the posts on chronic exertional compartment syndrome and stress fractures, so in discussing shin splints, we will focus specifically on medial tibial stress syndrome.

Do you need to see a doctor? Answer this ONE question about your leg injury!

Athletes with this condition typically complain of leg pain along the medial side of the tibia. Usually the pain is more diffuse than the pain with a stress fracture, which is often painful in a smaller, more localized area (although not always true). Runners notice increasing pain with running as they increase their distances or duration with training. Occasionally the pain seems to affect daily activities. Tips for safe and effective conditioning programs.

Sports medicine physicians will examine the runner or athletic person and usually find tenderness along the tibia even many centimeters. Signs of other problems such as calf tightness are most always absent. X-rays are usually normal, but physicians will order them to rule out stress fractures. Depending on the severity and duration of the symptoms, more advanced tests such as bone scans or MRI's are ordered.

Treatment for medial tibial stress syndrome is usually nonsurgical. Rest from running, or even just modifying activity and switching to less impact exercise such as swimming, biking, or using an elliptical trainer, is often necessary. Ice and anti-inflammatory medications, often provide pain relief. Physical therapy for stretching exercises and modalities can be helpful. The key is prevention. Runners need to increase their training slowly. When increasing distance for an upcoming race, they need to increase no more than 10% per week to give their tibias time to recover from the increased stress.

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2 Responses to Shin Splints (Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome)

GK says:
November 21, 2015 at 10:12 pm

I am a springboard diver (but I used to be a soccer player), and recently I have developed shin pain that I believe is shin splints based on past experiences. However, I have not been running. My only exercise has been diving, some ab work, and swimming. Could I still have shin splints from? Did I develop them from all the jumping on the diving board?

Reply

drdavidgeier says:
November 22, 2015 at 9:45 pm

Athletes other than runners can develop shin splints.

Reply

Leave a reply

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