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Shin Pain (Shin Splints)

What is shin pain?

Shin pain is pain on the front of your lower leg below the knee and above the ankle. It can hurt directly over your shinbone (tibia) or over the muscles that are on the inner or outer side of the tibia. Shin pain has often been called shin splints.

How does it occur?

Shin pain generally occurs from overuse. This problem can come from irritation of the muscles or other tissues in the lower leg or from a stress fracture. This injury is most common in runners who increase their mileage or the intensity of their running, or who change the surface on which they are running. When you walk or run your foot normally flattens out a small amount when it strikes the ground. If your foot flattens out more than normal it is called over-pronation, which can contribute to shin pain. Stress fractures can occur when the shin pain is left untreated. Causing pain to the touch of the skin and pain while walking. With medial tibial stress syndrome, you will have pain and tenderness along the edge of the shinbone, especially along the muscles. With compartment syndrome the muscles in that area will be painful. Blood vessels and nerves are also in the anterior compartment. If the muscles in this compartment become swollen during exercise they may irritate these nerves or blood vessels and your foot may become weak, numb, or cold.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your lower leg. They will decide which part of your shin is the source of the pain. Your provider may watch you walk or run to see if you have problems with over-pronation. You may need an x-ray or a bone scan to check for stress fractures. You may have specific conditions that cause shin pain, including:

- **Medial stress syndrome:** This is when the muscles (tibialis anterior or the soleus muscle) that attach to the inner side of your tibia are inflamed.
- **Stress fracture:** This is a hairline crack in one of the lower leg bones, the tibia or fibula.
- **Compartment syndrome:** Your anterior compartment is an area in your leg that contains the muscles that point your foot and toes toward your body. When this compartment is overused the muscles will become painful.

What are the symptoms?

You have pain over the front part of your lower leg. You may have pain during exercise, at rest, or both. Stress fractures of the tibia will give you pain directly over your shinbone. If you have compartment syndrome you may need a test that measures the pressure in your lower leg compartment. This is done using a needle attached to a measuring device. They will perform this test at rest and then again after exercise.

How is it treated?

Treatment may include:

- **Ice:** Apply ice packs to your shin for 15 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for 2 or 3 days or until the pain goes away. Or use perform an ice massage by freezing water in a styrofoam cup. Peel the top of the cup away to expose the ice and hold onto the bottom of the cup while you rub ice over your leg for 5 to 10 minutes.
- **Medicine:** Take anti-inflammatory medication as prescribed by your health care provider.
- Have *The Running Store* perform a gait analysis to ensure your shoes are not aggravating your condition.
- Physical Therapy / Sports Chiropractic will focus on stretching the tissues of your lower leg and strengthen the weak muscles that are contributing to the problem. Kinesio Taping may also be helpful.
- Perform *Toe Taps*, 30 in each direction (Front, toes in, toes out, before and after you run).
- Rehabilitation exercises listed below.
- Untreated shin pain can become stress fractures.
- Surgery is rarely necessary, except in compartment syndromes.

While you are recovering from your injury, you will need to change your sport or activity to one that does not make your condition worse. For example, you may need to bicycle or swim instead of run. When you begin to run again, you should wear good shoes and run on soft surfaces.



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When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon your leg recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better. You may safely return to your sport or activity when, starting from the top of the list and progressing to the end, each of the following is true:

- ▶ You have full range of motion and strength in the injured leg compared to the uninjured leg.
- ▶ You can jog and sprint straight ahead without pain or limping.
- ▶ You can jump on both legs without pain and you can jump-on the injured leg without pain.

How can I prevent shin pain?

Since shin pain usually occurs from overuse, be sure to begin your activities gradually.

- ▶ Wear shoes with proper padding.
- ▶ Run on softer surfaces.
- ▶ Warm up properly and stretch the muscles in the front of your leg and in your calf.
- ▶ Do not keep running while you have shin pain or it will take longer for the pain to go away.

Rehabilitation Exercises

Start these exercises when your pain has decreased by about 25% from the time when your injury was most painful.

1. TOWEL STRETCH: Sit on a hard surface with your injured leg stretched out in front of you. Loop a towel around the ball of your foot and pull the towel toward your body keeping your knee straight. Hold this position for 20 seconds then relax. Repeat 3 times. Start using the standing calf stretch when you don't feel much of a stretch using the towel.

2. STANDING CALF STRETCH: Facing a wall, put your hands against the wall at about eye level. Keep the injured leg back, the uninjured leg forward, and the heel of your injured leg on the floor. Turn your injured foot slightly inward (as if you were pigeon-toed) as you slowly lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in the back of your calf. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times, several times each day.

3. ANKLE RANGE OF MOTION: Sitting or lying down with your legs straight and your knee toward the ceiling, move your ankle up and down, in and out, and in circles. Only move your ankle, not your leg. Repeat 10 times in each direction. Push hard in all directions.

4. ANTERIOR COMPARTMENT STRETCH: Stand with one hand against a wall or chair for balance. Bend your knee and grab the front of your foot on your injured leg. Bend the front of the foot toward your heel. You should feel a stretch in the front of your shin. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

5. RESISTED DORSIFLEXION: Sit with your injured leg out straight and your foot facing a doorway. Tie a loop in one end of the tubing. Put your foot through the loop so that the tubing goes around the arch of your foot. Tie a knot in the other end of the tubing and shut the knot in the door. Move backward until there is tension in the tubing. Keeping your knee straight, pull your foot toward your body, stretching the tubing. Slowly return to the starting position. Do 3 sets of 10.

6. RESISTED PLANTAR FLEXION: Sit with your leg outstretched and loop the middle section of the tubing around the ball of your foot. Hold the ends of the tubing in both hands. Gently press the ball of your foot down and point your toes, stretching the tubing. Return to the starting position. Do 3 sets of 10.

7. RESISTED INVERSION: Sit with your legs out straight and cross your uninjured leg over your injured ankle. Wrap the tubing around the ball of your injured foot and then loop it around your uninjured foot so that the tubing is anchored there at one end. Hold the other end of the tubing in your hand. Turn your injured foot inward and upward. This will stretch the tubing. Return to the starting position. Do 3 sets of 10.

8. RESISTED EVERSION: Sit with both legs stretched out in front of you, with your feet about a shoulder's width apart. Tie a loop in one end of the tubing. Put your injured foot through the loop so that the tubing goes around the arch of that foot and wraps around the outside of the uninjured foot. Hold onto the other end of the tubing. With your hand to provide tension, turn your injured foot up and out. Make sure you keep your uninjured foot still so that it will allow the tubing to stretch as you move your injured foot. Return to the starting position. Do 3 sets of 10.

9. HEEL RAISES: Balance yourself while standing behind a chair or counter. Raise your body up onto your toes and hold it for 5 seconds, then slowly lower yourself down. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets of 10.

10. SITTING TOE RAISE: Sit in a chair with your feet flat on floor. Raise the toes and the ball of your injured foot off the floor while keeping your heel on the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets of 10.

11. STANDING TOE RAISE: Stand with your feet flat on the floor, rock back onto your heels and lift your toes off the floor. Hold this for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.