

Shin Splints

Shin splints are an injury that occurs from overuse in running or fast walking. The pain from shin splints is very characteristic. It will be located on the inside edge of the middle region of the lower half of the leg next to the shin bone (tibia). This pain can be very uncomfortable and cause the person to stop running. In order to be diagnosed, this requires an examination of the lower shin bone and checking of the feet, hip and knee.

Shin splints are caused by inflammation of the connective tissue attaching to the shin bones. This type of condition is seen most frequently in runners as well as fast and long-distance walkers but it is also a common condition suffered by anyone going in the military or police due to marching and wearing hard shoes.

It's rare to see non-sports people suffering with this condition, except in cases where people are walking particularly fast and regularly in hard shoes. So this can affect commuters who are walking quickly to work or the train station each day.

In endurance or long distance runners, especially marathon and ultra-marathon runners, shin splints can progress to a stress fracture of the tibia.

Shin Splints Anatomy

In order to understand shin splints, it helps to know the leg's anatomy. The leg contains 4 bones: the femur of thighbone, the patella or kneecap, the tibia which is a thick bone in the front of the lower leg and the fibula which is also in the lower leg but this one is thin and on the side.

Since shin splints occur in the lower leg, we will focus on that area. The front of the tibia is known as the shin. The muscles in the area of the lower leg control the movement of the ankle and foot.

The medical name for shin splints is called medial tibial stress syndrome. That basically means "medial", being the inside of the shin. Tibial refers to the shin bone. Stress syndrome refers to repeated stress being placed through the shin bone.

How to Treat Shin Splints:

Often, this injury will heal by itself if activity levels are reduced. If you decide to see a physician or manual therapist then expect a full exam. You may even be asked to run in order to look for issues. There may be bone scans or X-rays taken to look for any possible fractures.

- Rest your body and give it the time that it needs to heal.
- Apply ice to the injured site for 5 – 10 minutes at a time three to five times a day.
- Anti-inflammatory pain killers such as ibuprofen and aspirin or even naproxen will assist with both the swelling and the pain. Take care with these seemingly harmless drugs though as overuse can lead to stomach ulcers, so only use it for the short term, and if symptoms persist consult a sports or physical therapist.
- Orthotics may assist with the shin splints if your feet are flat, or if you have poor foot and ankle biomechanics. Podiatrists often deal with these issues, as well as other manual therapists trained in foot mechanics.
- Your manual therapist may prescribe exercises known as range of motion exercises. Physical therapy may also be recommended in an effort to get the muscles in your shins stronger.

- There are also neoprene sleeves that may help with shin splints. These will both support the leg and keep it warm.

Tips:

- Wear shoes with good padding and support that fit correctly.
- Warm up and stretch the muscles in your legs thoroughly before you work out.
- If you feel pain in your shins stop what you are doing.
- Don't play or run on surfaces that are hard...like concrete, if you are regularly training.
- Have your training regimen checked out by a professional.
- Slow down your walking speed!

Take care that you do not avoid seeing a doctor or therapist as these same symptoms could be indicative of a stress fracture in your shin.