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What is: Shin Splints

Definition

Shin splints is a general term used to refer to a painful condition along the shinbone (tibia), which is the large bone in the front of your lower leg and is often caused by running or jumping. It can also be very slow to heal and can force a longer recovery for runners. There is no direct cure for shin splints; it heals with time and rest. Signs of shin splints can include tenderness or soreness along the inner part of your lower leg or swelling. Causes, particularly for runners, can be running downhill, on slanted or tilted surfaces, or running in worn-out footwear. If you have just started a running program or have flat arches and do not have the proper footwear to support your feet then you might be more susceptible to developing shin splints.

Treatment

In most cases, shin splints can be treated by self-care. Rest is one of the most important and probably easiest treatment methods for shin splints. However, this does not mean to give up on physical activities all together but to try low-impact exercises such as swimming, water running, or bicycling. Icing is another treatment method that you can do 3-4 times daily for 20 minutes at a time. Freezing water in a paper cup then massaging the affected shin with the ice is a good way to do this. Other treatments include elevating the affected area while resting or at night to reduce swelling, taking over the counter anti-inflammatories to reduce the pain, and selecting footwear with the proper cushion and arch support that your specific foot type needs.

Prevention

There are several preventative actions that can be taken to slow the risk of shin splints in runners:

- Wearing the proper footwear and replacing your shoes every 350-500 miles
- Consider arch supports if you have flat arches
- Use cross-training methods such as swimming or biking or train on softer surfaces such as grass or dirt when possible to lessen the impact and strain on the shin.
- Strengthen your shins by doing toe raises. Stand up. Slowly rise up on your toes, and then slowly lower your heels to the floor. Repeat 10 times. When this becomes easy, do the exercise holding progressively heavier weights. Leg presses and other exercises for your lower legs can be helpful, too.

Sources
www.mayoclinic.com. 2007. Mayo Clinic.
www.wikipedia.org. 2007. Wikipedia.