

FITNESS FOCUS

“PREVENTING SHIN SPLINTS”

How many of you can relate to having shin splints arise after you've started a running or walking routine in the past? Maybe you're currently dealing with an injury. These injuries can be quite annoying and can keep you from participating in the activities that you desire. In this article, we'll look into how you can prevent and care for these injuries so you can get back into action.

First, what is a shin splint? Shin splints is a general term for what could be a wide range of conditions that can affect your lower leg or your “shin” area. These can range from tendonitis in a few different places, micro tears or inflammation to connective tissues along your shin bone, stress fractures, or a more uncommon structural problem known as compartment syndrome. It will be important to have a health care professional determine what condition you have to properly care for the injury.

Some of the initial basic questions that your provider may ask you when dealing with a general shin splints are listed below:

- Can you pin point where the pain is coming from or is it more of a dispersed pain?
- Have you had a previous injury to this area?
- When does it bother you (During activity, before activity, after activity, at night, in the morning)?
- How long has the pain been occurring?
- What kind of activity have you been doing or have you increased your activity significantly?
- Where have you been performing your activity (treadmill, concrete, hills, incline)?
- Are there any other injuries (hip, knee, ankle, foot) or muscle tightness that could be causing these conditions that you know of?

To help care for or to assist in preventing shin splints, here are a few things to consider:

- **Start off slow**— Many shin splints occur when a person increases activity too quickly. For example running, too many miles too soon without proper adaptation. Be sure to ease into your walking or running program.
- **Proper Stretching**— Be sure to focus on stretching your calf muscles. Tight calf muscle can cause extra strain placed on your shins. Find a step or wall to properly stretch this muscle. Also consider other leg muscles that could be tight (i.e. hamstrings and quadriceps). Hold these stretches for at least 10 seconds and be sure to warm-up before stretching by performing cardio activity for 5–10 minutes.
- **Strengthening**— It is important to perform strengthening exercises to the lower leg muscles. Especially if you have a history of shin splints. Performing both reverse calf raises (see picture for example) and calf raises on a step are excellent exercises. Other exercises that provide resistance when bringing your foot up (dorsiflexion) with a thera-band or weighted ankle weights can be good ways to strengthen your shins. Balance exercises and other controlled exercises are also good.
- **Rest, Ice, and NSAIDs**— This is a typical protocol for any initial injury and is very important to use for shin splints. Rest by decreasing your activity by possibly taking a week or two off. During these weeks, consider lower impact activities such as the rower, bike, or swimming for cardio. Be sure to ice for 20 minutes at least 2–4 times per day. Apart from just ice bags, you can use ice cups to massage or do ice baths. As needed, take a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug as directed to help decrease any pain and/or swelling.
- **Consider footwear**—If your shoes are becoming worn or not properly fitting your foot, this may be contributing to your shin splints. Consider getting new shoes or seeking out professional input on the proper shoe that fits your foot.
- **Overtraining**— If you have been doing a lot of activity lately, be careful that you're not “overtraining” your body. Be sure to incorporate days of rest or at least lighter workouts into your training schedule. Any type of overtraining can quickly break your body down and lead to injury.



Keep these recommendations in mind when you're dealing with a case of “shin splints”. Remember that this is just a general term for a range of possible injuries. Most injuries can be treated with what has been listed. However, if the pain persists, consider going to your physician. If there are any other questions or if you have a specific case that needs to be discussed, please don't hesitate asking me by stopping by the Nimkee Fitness Center.

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