Shin Splints

Understanding shin pain, symptoms and recovery

Shin Splints (Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome)

A guide to causes, treatment and recovery



What are shin splints?

Shin splints cause pain along the inner edge of the shin bone (tibia). They commonly affect runners, walkers and people doing repetitive-impact sports.

Why do they happen?

Repeated loading can overload the muscles, tendons and bone tissue around the shin.

Symptoms, causes and diagnosis

Recognising shin splints and understanding assessment

1. Common symptoms

Dull aching pain along the inner shin; pain during exercise that may ease with rest; tenderness to touch and sometimes mild swelling.

2. Common contributing factors

Sudden increases in training; hard or uneven surfaces; worn footwear; flat feet or over-pronation; tight calves or weak leg muscles.

3. How are shin splints diagnosed?

A clinician usually assesses symptoms, activity levels and the shin. Scans are not routinely needed unless a stress fracture or another condition is suspected.

4. Reducing aggravating activity

Temporarily reduce running or impact activities that increase pain. Try lower-impact activities while symptoms settle.

5. Footwear and support

Wear well-fitting supportive footwear and replace worn trainers. Insoles may help some people.

Important information

Pain that is focal, severe, occurs at rest or at night, or is not improving needs clinical assessment.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Gentle movement and strengthening under clinical guidance

Shin splints exercise examples

The original leaflet illustrates calf stretches, ankle movements, resistance-band exercises, heel raises and balance work. Progress as advised by your physiotherapist.



Rehabilitation

Build activity gradually as pain settles. A physiotherapist can tailor calf, foot and hip strengthening and balance exercises.

Recovery and next steps

Practical steps to manage shin splints and prevent recurrence

1. Rest and activity modification

Reduce painful impact activities and return to running or sport gradually when symptoms improve.

2. Ice and pain relief

Use a wrapped ice pack for 10–15 minutes after activity. Ask a pharmacist or clinician about suitable pain relief.

3. Recovery time

Many people improve within 4–8 weeks, although recovery varies with severity and activity levels.

4. Prevention

Increase training gradually, vary surfaces, warm up, maintain strength and flexibility, and wear suitable footwear.

5. When to seek further help

Seek assessment if pain persists, occurs at rest or at night, or swelling and tenderness are localised. Severe sudden pain or inability to bear weight needs urgent advice.

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