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How to Prevent Common Running Injuries

Running is a great way to get in shape, but it can also lead to injuries. Knowing about common injuries and how to prevent them can keep you on track toward reaching your fitness goals.

Running right

Experts recommend the following strategies to prevent injuries:

- **Identify your running goals.** You may choose to start running to improve your figure, lose weight, increase cardiovascular fitness, or socialize with friends. Whatever the reason, it's a good idea to identify this goal when creating your exercise program. If you want to improve cardiovascular fitness, for instance, you should run at a quick pace to maximize your heart rate. If you're running to lose weight or reduce body fat, it's better to run at a slower rate for a longer time. Depending on your goal, your healthcare provider or personal trainer may decide that a modest walking or jogging program is appropriate. Setting goals helps you follow a safe pace and keeps you from overexertion, which can result in injury.
- **Have a physical evaluation.** Certain health problems may hamper your running performance and increase your risk for injury. Specifically, osteoporosis, arthritis, and other degenerative joint diseases can increase your injury risk. If you have any significant health issues, you should discuss these with your healthcare provider before you start to run.
- **Warm up before you run and stretch after you run.** Doing so can prevent some of the most common injuries. It's most important to stretch muscles that move your leg and ankle joints. These include the calf muscle, which moves the knee and ankle, and the hamstring, which moves the knee and hip. Walk or gently jog for 5 minutes. Cool down at the same pace for another 5 minutes at the end of your run.
- **Wear the correct shoes.** Buy running shoes at an athletic store, where a salesclerk can help you choose a shoe that fits your foot type. This can help prevent injuries.

Common injuries

The following injuries are common among runners:

- **Achilles tendinitis.** This injury is marked by dull or sharp pain along the back of the Achilles tendon, calf tightness, and early morning stiffness. Stretching can help prevent this injury. To treat it, rest and stretch until the pain is gone. Anti-inflammatory medicine may also help.
- **Plantar fasciitis.** This injury is an inflammation of the plantar fascia. This is a fibrous band of tissue that is part of your arch. It runs along the bottom of the foot and attaches at the heel. Correct stretching can help prevent such an injury. Anti-inflammatory medicine, stretching, and ice compresses help relieve pain.
- **Shin splints.** This injury is caused by overuse or poor conditioning. It gets worse when you run on hard surfaces. This injury causes pain on the inside of the shinbone. Shin splints are treated by rest and stretching until the pain is gone. You can relieve symptoms by stretching and using ice and anti-inflammatory medicines. Once your symptoms have eased, you should make changes in the distance you run and your speed.

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