

# Running Injuries

By Dennis Schepmann, MPT, CWS

After months, possibly years, of striving you have almost attained a fitness level that will allow you to set a personal best in an upcoming race. Everything is going well until...you sustain an injury. Anger and disappointment follow. How could this happen?

Every veteran runner has experienced this scenario at some point in their running career. Questions arise: What could I have done differently? Why isn't my body holding up like it used to? Should I run through this injury, like I have others, and hope it goes away? Is this serious enough to seek medical advice? Is my doctor going to offer me advice other than to stop running? These are all valid questions that should be asked when an injury occurs.

The best solution is prevention. Run smarter. Learn from past injuries to avoid the same mistakes in the future. Talk with other runners to avoid potential pitfalls. Listen to your body (one of the biggest mistakes runners typically make is to ignore the voice in their head telling them to back off, although it is the same voice they often have to ignore on harder training days). Set realistic time frames for training and races. Get enough rest. Eat healthy. Have check ups and follow the advice of your physician or physical therapist.

OK. You know all that and yet you are still in pain from your current injury. There are many injuries that are common to runners: plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendonitis, shin splints, IT band friction syndrome, patellar tendonitis, hamstring strain, stress fractures, hip or SI pain just to name the more common ones. Each injury is unique just as each runner is unique in their ability, style of running, and genetic makeup. Even though a running partner may have had the same problem you are experiencing, it does not mean your injury is due to the same reason. The most common reason for injury is training error. If you are beginning a different phase of your training, is the mileage or intensity increase appropriate? Are you giving your body enough recovery time between runs? How many miles have you run in your current shoes? Other general reasons for injuries include: muscle weakness, muscle imbalance with synergistic muscles, tightness of muscles or joints, changes in bony alignment like in the foot causing increased pronation, and lastly...age.

So how do you recover from your current injury? First, if possible, determine the cause of your injury. This can lead you to a solution to correct the problem. Tight muscle, stretch it. Weak muscle, strengthen it. Alignment changes, consider orthotics or medical attention. Training error, adjust your training. Does this mean you must stop running? Not necessarily. Again, be honest with yourself and determine if you need full cessation of running versus relative rest (a decrease in mileage or intensity to allow for recovery but still allowing yourself to continue to run).

If the injury does not clear through self-treatment, seek medical advice/treatment. It is always beneficial to speak with medical personnel who have a good working knowledge

of running or who are runners themselves. Physicians can order diagnostic studies (x-rays to rule out a stress fracture) or prescribe medications. However, medications may help clear your symptoms, but may not address the cause of your symptoms. Once you stop taking the medication the symptoms may return if you haven't addressed the source of your problem. You must correct the cause of the problem and not just treat the symptoms. Other health care professionals, such as osteopaths and physical therapists can help correct these issues. I naturally lean more towards physical therapy since I am a therapist. Physical therapists can test for muscle imbalance/weakness, assess your running technique, discuss training regimens (if they have a background in running), assess and correct alignment issues (e.g. foot pronation), and provide other treatments (ultrasound, massage, exercise instruction) to help you recover from your injury.

The goal is to get you back to running and running pain free! Take care of that nagging injury so you can enjoy your runs and reach whatever personal goals you may have.

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