SHIN SPLINTS & STRESS FRACTURES



ESSENTIAL FACTS

Shin splints and stress fractures are overuse injuries from sharp rises in activity amount or intensity. Even so, these distinct injuries affect the body in different ways.

Shin splints involve tiny tears in the soft tissues of the lower leg.

Stress fractures are changes, such as cracks or breaks, in lower-leg bones. When tired muscles cannot absorb extra shock, the impact passes to the bone.

Key Facts About Shin Splints and Stress Fractures

- Most stress fractures affect weight-bearing bones in the lower leg and foot.
- Over 50 percent of stress fractures are in the lower leg.
- Studies identify tennis, track and field, gymnastics and basketball athletes as most prone to shin splints and stress fractures.
- Studies also find that female athletes generally have more stress fractures than male athletes.

Getting a Diagnosis

To tell shin splints from a stress fracture, see your athletic trainer or sports medicine professional. They can fully evaluate the injury and may advise more tests, such as an MRI or bone scan. The clinician can also help adjust your activity to support healing.

Preventing Shin Splints and Stress Fractures

- Ask your AT to check that your footwear is appropriate.
- Follow a healthy diet.
- Ask a clinician whether to take vitamin D and/or calcium supplements.
- Adjust your training schedule with your athletic trainer to limit repeated stress.
- Build leg muscle strength and flexibility.
- Keep a healthy balance between training and recovery.
- Cross-train to meet fitness goals with activities such as deep-water running, swimming or cycling.

References: National Athletic Trainers' Association, American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons
Infographic: National Athletic Trainers' Association