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How to run and stay injury free

By Alyssa Rose | First published: August 8th, 2011

Expert tips for preventing common running injuries.

Running can do wonders for stress and fitness levels but it can come with a long list of potential injuries too. Here, Brad McIntosh, Doctor of Physical Therapy at Sydney Sports and Orthopaedic Physiotherapy, reveals the latest preventative methods to keep you on your feet and injury free at any distance.

Fun run

Problem: shin splints

If you've just started training, you are at greater risk of developing shin splints. Your muscles, tendons and bones are yet to adapt to the stresses of running, and although there are many contributing factors, rapidly increasing your training is the number one cause of shin splints, says McIntosh.

How to prevent it

- "Start your training well in advance of an event and don't increase your total mileage by more than 10-15 per cent per week.

- If you are a beginner, leave at least one day between runs to allow the body to heal."

Problem: blisters

"Nothing gets in the way of an enjoyable fun run faster than the dreaded blister. "Like the other tissues in the body, your skin needs to adapt to the forces of running and often it's the skin that lets you down first," notes McIntosh.

How to fix it

- "The size and shape of your shoe needs to be perfect so it's a good idea to be professionally fitted at a running shop.
- Try wearing two pairs of socks so the friction occurs between the layers rather than between the sock and your skin.
- Spray antiperspirant on your feet for a couple of weeks. Research shows this strategy is successful in reducing blisters in runners."

Half Marathon

Problem: tendon problems

Problems with the Achilles tendon (from the back of the heel to the lower calf muscle) are one of the most common injuries seen in sports medicine practice says McIntosh. "Not only are they common, they can take a long time to heal on their own and often don't heal with rest alone," he says.

How to fix it

- "Research shows the best way to heal a damaged Achilles tendon is by exercising it. To do this, perform a calf raise on both feet, then lift one foot off the ground and lower down on the affected foot. Aim for about 180 reps per day and add some resistance if appropriate," McIntosh says.

Marathon

Problem: chafing

As you start to move into the longer distances, chafing can become an undesirable side effect we often forget to prepare for. Almost anything that moves can chafe, particularly the underarms, the singlet on the nipples and of course the inner thigh.

How to prevent it

- "Don't wear anything new, including shoes, socks, and underwear with a

raised seam as this can rub on your skin.

- Apply plenty of Vaseline to the underarms, nipples and inner thigh," says McIntosh.

Problem: hyponatremia and dehydration

Two of the biggest problems for long distance athletes are dehydration and hyponatremia, and although some of the symptoms can be fairly similar, they are very different.

Dehydration occurs when you loose excessive amounts of body fluids through sweat. However hyponatremia occurs when the salt levels in the blood fall to a low-level, and the condition is exacerbated by drinking excessive fluids, says McIntosh. "It is dangerous, with severe cases leading to brain swelling, seizures and other life-threatening complications," he says.

How to prevent it

- "During a marathon, drink regularly, preferably sports drinks, and when thirsty, but don't force yourself to drink fluids. Drink less if you start to feel sick and have a liquid 'sloshy' feeling in your stomach.

- Weigh yourself before the run and write your pre-race weight on your bib. If you have any trouble at the end of the run this will be useful information for the medical staff," McIntosh says.

- Don't slam the fluids down at the end of the run as this is when the risk of hyponatremia is high. Nibble on some food and sip a sports drink slowly until you feel recovered."

Read our fact sheet on [Shin splints](#).