

Running and jogging – preventing injury

About one in every three recreational runners will have a running-related injury at some stage in their life. About three running-related injuries out of every four occur in the lower leg. Common sites include the knee, ankle, shin and foot. Runners are also likely to experience back and groin injuries.

Running does have a risk of injury, but if you follow some simple guidelines like warming up, wearing the right clothes and not pushing yourself too hard, most injuries can be prevented.

Common injuries

Common injuries include:

- **Blisters** – caused by the foot sliding or rubbing inside the shoe.
- **Shin splints** – pain and inflammation in the muscles and tendons that run the length of the shin.
- **Soft tissue injuries** – such as a pulled muscle or ligament sprain.
- **Skin injuries** – such as sunburn and bruises. Falling over while running or jogging can cause cuts and abrasions.

Risk factors

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- **Overtraining** – running beyond your current level of fitness can put muscles, tendons and ligaments under strain. ‘Shin splints’ is a common overuse injury in runners.
- **Incorrect technique** – poor running style can increase the risk of injuries. For example, running flat-footed pulls on the shin muscles and may cause small tears.
- **Incorrect shoes** – the wrong type of shoe can increase the risk of various injuries including blisters and shin splints.
- **Incorrect clothing** – wearing the wrong clothes can contribute to overheating, sunburn or cold injuries.
- **Hard surfaces** – the impact of running on hard surfaces, such as bitumen, can cause injuries including shin splints and stress fractures.
- **Other environmental factors** – such as running surfaces that are too loose and unstable (for example, sand), polluted air, environmental obstacles such as low-hanging tree branches, or sunburn.

General health suggestions

Some tips to help prevent injuries include:

- Warm up before running. Include plenty of slow and sustained stretches. Make sure you thoroughly stretch the muscles in your thighs and calves.
- Cool down after running. Incorporate stretches into your cool down routine.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your run.
- Don't push too hard beyond your current level of fitness. Plan to gradually increase how long and how often you run over a few months.
- Avoid running during the hottest part of the day in summer. Plan to run during the morning or evening.
- Apply SPF 30+ sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin.
- Wear layers of clothing on your upper body to avoid overheating. Wear loose cotton clothing.
- Consider having regular professional massage to relax tight, sore muscles.
- Avoid running near roads. Inhaling vehicle exhaust fumes can cause a range of breathing related (respiratory) problems.
- Run on flat and soft surfaces – for example, at your local running track or oval.
- Don't wear regular sneakers when running. Professionally fitted shoes designed for running will support your feet and reduce your risk of injury.
- Buy a new pair of running shoes on a regular basis, perhaps once per year. The average running shoe loses about half of its shock absorption ability after 400–800km of use. Put a reminder note in your training diary.

Safety tips

Suggestions include:

- Make sure that drivers can see you if you're running at night. For example, you could wear reflective materials.
- Run with a buddy. If you are running by yourself, tell someone your intended route and when you plan to return.
- Take your mobile phone with you in case of emergencies.
- Don't wear headphones. You need to hear the impending danger of a car horn or dog snarl.

See over ...

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Stop running. Trying to 'work through' the pain will only make the injury worse.
- See your doctor promptly for diagnosis and treatment.
- Treat soft tissue injuries such as ligament or muscle sprains with rest, icepacks, compression and elevation (raising the injured area above the level of your heart).
- Do not run again until the injury has completely healed. In the meantime, switch to a low impact form of exercise that doesn't aggravate the injury, such as swimming.
- Ask your doctor, physiotherapist or other health professional for medical advice before you start running again.
- Consider getting advice from an exercise physiologist. They can help you improve your running technique to reduce your risk of injury.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Always call triple zero for an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Physiotherapist
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 73 98 99
- Sports shoe store - to get an accurate fitting

Things to remember

- While injuries are common for runners, most can be prevented.
- Warm up before running, and incorporate plenty of slow and sustained stretches into your cool down routine.
- If you injure yourself, ask your doctor, physiotherapist or other health professional for medical advice before returning to running.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by Smartplay. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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