Getting Back to Pain Free Running

Foot and Ankle Pain

rebound

Sports & Physical Therapy

Studies estimate that between 20% and 80% of runners will suffer at least one injury each year. Risk factors include both extrinsic factors such as training errors, and intrinsic factors such as muscle strength and flexibility imbalances, previous injury, and positional/postural malalignment. Of the 20 or more running-specific injuries 70-80% occur from the knee and below. In the foot and ankle the most common diagnoses are **Achilles tendinitis/tendinosis**, **plantar fasciitis**, **stress fractures** and **overuse syndromes** affecting other lower leg and foot muscles and tendons.

Initial treatment of running injuries begins with determining the severity of the injury and classifying what stage the injury is in. Staging running injuries provides insight into the severity of the condition and a general prognosis. One recently proposed system for running injuries is:

Stage 1: Pain only upon exertion or running
Stage 2: Pain at rest
Stage 3: Pain that interferes with activities of daily living
Stage 4: Pain that is managed with medication
Stage 5: Pain that is crippling

The key to fixing and/or preventing foot and ankle injuries requires consideration of the following biomechanical variables:

Postural alignment: from the pelvis and hips all the way down to the feet.
Muscle firing patterns and strength: muscle inhibition/weakness vs. efficient activation of key running muscles.
Ground reaction forces: how is the foot striking, accommodating the forces of gravity during shock absorption, and then becoming a rigid lever for push off phase.
Proper running shoes
Efficient running technique

A good physical therapy evaluation should be able to assess all of these factors, and most importantly tie together the diagnosis with the biomechanics at play. You'll know you are in the wrong clinic if all they look at is your lower legs and feet, and the only advice given is to stretch and stretch and stretch. A treatment plan should not just focus on treating the symptoms (pain, swelling, etc.) but should also address the root causes of the problem which often are imbalances in places besides the feet such as the hips and pelvis. The treatment plan should incorporate strategies based on what stage the injury is in and a very specific home exercise program. Exercises for strength, dynamic single leg balance, and overall stability are key when treating foot and ankle problems.

If you have further questions, send us an email to Rebound@ReboundSportsPT.com