

# Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

If you are an avid walker, have begun a new exercise program or are an experienced runner, you may have experienced one of the most common lower extremity ailments, shin splints.

Shin splints are characterized as pain at the front inside area of the shin bone due to overexertion of the muscles. Shin splints usually involve small tears in the leg muscles where they are attached to the shin bone.

The most common cause of shin splints is inflammation of the periosteum of the tibia (sheath surrounding the bones). Some other common causes include flat feet (overpronation), a high arch (underpronation), inadequate footwear, running on hard surfaces and increasing training too quickly.

If you have flat feet or a high arch, I always recommend to my patients custom orthotics so that the foot will be supported and align in the neutral position, the correct position for walking and any athletic activity.

Orthotics, also known as orthoses, refers to any device inserted into a shoe, ranging from felt pads to custom-made shoe inserts that correct an abnormal or irregular walking pattern.

Sometimes called arch supports, orthotics allow people to stand, walk and run more efficiently and comfortably.

While over-the-counter orthotics are available and may help people with mild symptoms, they normally cannot correct the wide range of symptoms that prescription foot orthoses can since they are not custom made to fit an individual's foot structure. So remember, for long term control of your foot condition, you must get a custom orthotic, not an over-the-counter product.

Orthotic devices come in many shapes, sizes and materials and are not the bulky orthotics of the past, so, women, don't be concerned. One must realize though that orthotics will only help after foot inflammation and pain have subsided. Once your foot ailment is relieved, then orthotics can do their job and support your feet without exasperating the issue.

I see many patients wearing inadequate footwear, especially the wrong size. Most people's feet change as they get older and require a different size shoe.

Don't expect the shoes you bought in your 20s to fit in your 40s! This can be hard for women who have invested in a closet full of expensive designer shoes, but better to save your feet now from the worries of corrective surgeries in the future that can have many complications.

Have your feet professionally measured to ensure you have not only the correct length but width in your shoes. This will prevent a host of foot problems down the road.

Use the following tips to treat and prevent shin splints:

For immediate pain relief:

- Ice the area to reduce pain and inflammation.
- Take an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory, like ibuprofen.

For ongoing pain relief:

- Rest to allow the injury to heal.
- Stretch and strengthen the leg muscles.
- Wear insoles or custom orthotics that offer arch support.
- Make sure you have the right running shoe for your foot type and for the activity.
- Avoid running on hard surfaces.
- Shorten your stride.

Consult a podiatrist if your pain is really bad. You should get a full diagnosis to find out if there is a stress fracture in the area.



**Vail**

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