

Shin pains from walking? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I walk to campus everyday, sometimes going back and forth twice. I never really feel "fatigue" per se, but I've been having a lot of pain in my shins while walking. It subsides after a few minutes of sitting, and it doesn't happen while walking around campus, up stairs, etc. I do have flat feet, and apparently when I was younger I had a brace on my feet. I have never had this problem before, however. I haven't been doing anything unusual, either (except for walking up to school and back since this fall began.). What could this possibly mean?

— Sens-a-Shins

Answer

Dear Sens-a-Shins,

What you're describing sounds like the beginnings of a case of shin splints. Walking on pavement increases the stress on your joints and connective tissue. Shin splints are an inflammation of the muscle or tendons of the lower leg caused by repetitive walking or running on a hard surface. The symptoms are pain on the inner side of the shinbone (tibia) in the front part of the leg. Sometimes, it comes on very slowly and eventually becomes quite severe. Shin splints rarely result in permanent damage.

The best cure is to rest. Try taking the bus or train to school for a week. Wearing good shoes when you walk, and stretching your legs in an effective flexibility program before your walks, can help prevent the problem from getting worse or recurring. When choosing shoes, don't hesitate to spend a few extra dollars — you spend more time than you think every day walking back and forth to campus. Because you're walking on pavement, make sure the shoes have adequate cushioning. The shape of the shoe should correspond to the shape of your foot, without areas of pressure or pain, or a feeling of binding. Solicit advice from friends and from a few specialty stores about what brands and styles are best.

Flexibility exercises help to reduce muscle soreness and the chance of injury. Examples of simple exercises are the sitting heel-cord stretch, where you sit on the floor with one leg extended and the opposite leg bent with the foot against the inside of the thigh. Hook a towel

around the ball of the foot and pull the toes towards the knee. Keep your knee straight, and repeat ten times for each leg. Or, try the lying knee-pull, where you lie on your back with your legs extended and bring your left knee to your chest, grabbing just under your knee with both hands. Pull until you feel the stretch, and hold for ten seconds. Repeat for each side.

Before you start the exercises, take some time off from your regular pavement walking, allow your shins to rest, buy some good shoes, and then get into a reasonable exercise routine. Although walking sometimes seems innocuous, it actually is excellent aerobic exercise, and utilizes and strengthens your muscles. Therefore, you also need to treat your walks as you would any other form of exercise, and use proper equipment and stretch before and after.

Alice!

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Published date:

Dec 01, 1993

Last reviewed on:

Feb 21, 2014

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