

SPORTS SERIES - FOCUS ON RUNNING

Preventing Running Injuries



There are a number of things that people can do to help prevent and treat running-related foot and leg problems. Strengthening exercises to build support in the feet and ankles, advice on the best footwear for each sport or physical activity, and using orthotics can all make a difference. Foot care is also important for stopping or managing wear-and-tear injuries like blisters, corns and calluses, along with fungal infections such as Athlete's foot - a common problem for athletes at all levels. Follow the steps below to keep feet healthy and ready for the next race.

1. Warm-up: always warm-up thoroughly before a run. A good warm-up is crucial to injury prevention and muscles and joints should be acclimatised to the level of exercise to come through light aerobic activity and stretching exercises.

2. Fitness: injuries most commonly occur when the runner is tired and the muscles and ligaments are no longer working as hard as they should be to stabilise the joints and maintain balance. Runners should gradually increase the distance they are running so that the body is fit enough for the duration of the course, running further than the body is able to cope with is a quick route to injury.

3. Strength training: the sets of resistance weights are effective in building up the muscle required to support joints, in particular around the knee and ankle joints.

4. Shoes: the right equipment can mean the difference between a great race and a humiliating fail to finish. It's important to always wear proper running shoes that are suited to the terrain you are running on and specialist advice should be sought when purchasing running shoes. Thin-soled 'shoes' are also available for barefoot runners and help to protect the feet from injury. Your podiatrist can evaluate running shoes to check that they are suitable and can offer advice on changes that may make the world of difference to any pain or discomfort a runner is experiencing.

5. Orthotics: beyond the choice of terrain-appropriate running shoes, orthotics can provide extra support when you need it most. Orthotics are inserts that are placed inside your running shoes to adjust imbalances and restore the natural movement of your feet, which is often altered through compensating for other injuries or biomechanical problems. Customised sports orthotics help to realign your posture by restoring natural balance in your range of movement and also cushioning the impact through added silicone pads placed in the insole to absorb some of the force created during high-impact activity.

6. Braces and padding: sports braces are designed to protect and stabilise the joint. Runners often wear these braces around the ankle or knee joints, and they are especially important if a runner has had a prior injury to the joint.

7. Cool down: a proper cool down is just as important to injury prevention as a warm-up before a run. Stretching after training lowers long-term risk of muscle tightening and also reduces muscular pain in the days following a run.

