

Lower Leg Pain

Lower leg pain, also known as shin splints, is a common injury that can occur with repeated running or jumping. While it is mostly seen in track and cross country athletes, it can also occur in other sports that involve a lot of running, such as soccer and lacrosse.

Shin splints, or medial tibial stress syndrome, is pain on the medial side, or inside of the lower leg. Pain on the lateral, or outside of the lower leg, can be associated with tendonitis or a strain of the outside muscles. Both can be resolved with similar treatment

Stretching – stretching the calves, in addition to the muscles of the upper leg and hip is essential in treating lower leg pain. Holding a stretch off the end of a step or up against a wall is a great way to stretch the calves. Make sure to hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds and repeat 3 times per leg. Foam rolling the lower body is another great way to loosen up as well.

Strengthening – it is important to not only strengthen the muscles of the ankle, but also the hip. For many people, lower leg pain stems from having weak hip muscles that cannot stabilize the hip during running and therefore, the forces that occur with each step are transferred down through the lower leg. Hip exercises include squats, side lying leg raises, clamshells and lunges. Exercises for the ankle include 4-way theraband resistance and calf raises. See your athletic trainer to learn how to properly execute these exercises

Footwear – Having proper shoes is essential in supporting the muscles around the foot and calves. Having flat feet or high arches will dictate what kind of shoes you need. Custom or store bought shoe inserts can also be used.

Ice – As with any injury caused by inflammation, ice is beneficial in relieving pain and decreasing inflammation. After every practice or game, make sure you ice your shins for 15-20 minutes. Another great way to ice is to do an ice cup massage. Fill up a paper cup 2/3 of the way with water and freeze completely. Then tear off the top of the cup and rub around the area of pain for 10 minutes. This will give the benefits of both ice and soft tissue massage.

Rest/Cross training – If lower leg pain continues to occur, taking some time off of running can help the area heal properly. While it is difficult to take time off during the season, taking a few days to a week can prevent the pain from getting worse throughout the remainder of the season. To keep your cardio up, non-weight bearing cross training can be used, such as biking or swimming.

If you are experiencing lower leg pain, see your athletic trainer for an evaluation and to learn more about these treatment options. Additionally, all ATI Physical Therapy clinics offer free injury screens. The Northville clinic is home to a specialty running clinic known as The Running Institute. You can reach them at 248-773-3680. You can also reach the Plymouth clinic at 734-259-7102.