



Forget 'No Pain, No Gain'

PROPER MEDICAL TREATMENT IS KEY TO KEEPING YOU ON YOUR FEET

By K.H. Queen

Congratulations: you've decided to make spring training a part of your lifestyle to get healthy. You're ready to hit the track, the trails or the open road on foot. But forget about 'no pain, no gain.' As you strive to improve your overall health, you need to prevent the agony of the feet.

"A person may decide 'I need to start running three miles today because I want to run a 5K race next week,'" says Dr. Brendan McConnell of Hampton Roads Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine with offices in Newport News, Williamsburg and Yorktown. "Instead of gradually working up to it, they might start walking three to four miles a day. If your body is not ready to handle that stress, then your body may find its weak points, and it can result in an injury."

Those weak points are often your feet and legs. Proper training and the right shoes can make a difference. Although each body and each pair of feet is different, women, people over 40 and people who are overweight are more vulnerable to training injuries, McConnell says. Women are more likely to be injured because they have less bone mass, and their wider pelvises put more stress from hip to knee to feet.

"If you're 20 years old, you can do a lot of things that maybe you shouldn't do and get away with them," he says.

If your 20s and your skinny sweatpants are way back in the rearview mirror, then it's bet-

ter to start training at least two months before you walk or run your first race.

"Dramatically increasing from a one-mile run to three or four miles too quickly does not help your body prepare for increasing stress to the muscles, bones, ligaments and joints," he says. "Incremental increases in training distance, speed and intensity are less likely to result in injury for beginning runners and distance walkers," McConnell says.

An often-cited training rule of thumb—or rule of toe—is to increase your total running distance by 10 percent each week.

When something hurts, listen to your body. Although some stress on your body is good, running through the pain can lead to injuries. Then, not getting proper treatment can make those injuries linger and worsen.

"Some people are gung-ho—they think they can run through the pain," McConnell says. "But whenever you have pain, that's your body telling you something is not right."

Plantar fasciitis is a common runners' ailment and causes stabbing pain, usually first thing in the morning, in the band of tissue called the plantar fascia that connects your heel bone to your toes across the bottom of your foot.

Ninety percent of people with plantar fasciitis get better with the standard medical treatment available, McConnell says. Ten percent will need surgery to resolve the condition.

"Some people will self treat for years," McConnell says. "They'll roll their foot on a

golf ball or tennis ball. I'll ask, 'how long have you done that?' and they'll say, 'Six years.'"

Proper treatment includes immobilization with cast boots and other orthotic devices as well as sports taping, cortisone injections, stretching and prescription anti-inflammatory medications.

Stress reactions and stress fractures can happen as a result of over training—when the muscles, ligaments and bones no longer are able to handle the stress load, resulting in tissue failure and injury.

"If you incrementally stress an area, the bone and muscle will get stronger," he says. "But if you go beyond what your body can handle, that's when your body is going to start hurting. That's your bone telling you 'I'm having a problem here.'"

Running through the pain can result in an injury that will damage the body, sideline the participant and require medical attention, he says. Treatment for a stress reaction or stress fracture will involve rest, possible immobilization with a walking boot and a good diet with protein, vitamin D and calcium.

Even if you don't have an injury, cross training and rest are important.

"Getting proper sleep is a big thing—if you're injured in any way, your body really needs rest to repair itself," McConnell says. "The point of exercise is to do something healthy for yourself. But if you hurt yourself, you're out. You lose that time to do what keeps you healthy."