

Running

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RUNNING NOTEBOOK

It's important not to ignore the pain

Experts say runners must take proactive approach

By ROBERTA MACINNIS
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Sports writer Bob Schaller had just started running when his agent approached him about collaborating on *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Running Injury Free*.

He was exhausted. His knees hurt. His ankles hurt. So did his back and abdomen.

"I was really bad at it. What I did didn't pass for running in most countries. I told him, 'I don't know if there's a way to run injury-free,'" said Schaller, who had also tried running years earlier before quickly quitting in frustration.

But after working with co-author Damon Martin, an award-winning coach at Colorado's Adams State College, Schaller learned otherwise.

He had been going about it the wrong way: He'd run too much too soon. He didn't give himself enough time to recover. He never stretched. He didn't have a pair of proper shoes, and he ran only on cement.

Now, two years later, *Running Injury Free* is new in bookstores, and Schaller, 42, is nearly 70 pounds lighter and a happy, healthy runner.

While runners with thousands of miles on their legs might seem the most obvious candidates for overuse injuries, novice runners such as Schaller are susceptible as well.

Common overuse injuries include shinsplints, chronic plantar fasciitis (pain in the heel), pain in the knees and hips, and stress fractures. They can be caused by training errors, such as improper running form or individual biomechanical issues like muscle imbalances or uneven body alignment, reports the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine.

Houston podiatrist Jeffrey A. Ross says he's diagnosing an increasing number of middle-aged runners with overuse injuries, particularly chronic plantar fasciitis, insertional Achilles' tendinitis (pain in the back of the foot) and hallux rigidus, or jamming of the big toe.

Ross recently led a symposium — *Overuse Injuries in the Baby Boomer, the Results of Years of Abuse* — at a meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine.

Ross attributes the increase in overuse injuries not only to an aging population of active people but to the fact many recreational runners aren't particularly built for running.

"Some people may have those bodies that allow them to do it. Some people don't. They're going to be more at risk for injury," Ross said.

So how can a runner tell when an ache or pain is an overuse injury?

"If it happens more and more frequently and happens earlier in the runs. If it's taking you longer and longer to get over it. If it's not going away. If even with rest, you're not getting any relief, that's a pretty good sign of overuse injury, regardless of where it is," said Dr. C. David Geier Jr., an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery at Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston and an AOSSM member.

It's important to address recurring pain sooner rather than later, Geier said.

"Kind of hit it early on. Ice your knee. Stretch appropriately. Take care of yourself," he said.

The sports medicine society, he said, recommends not increasing mileage by more than 10 percent each week.

How can you tell when you need medical attention?

"If your pain is interfering with what you want to do," Geier said, explaining that it's better to seek help when, say, you're having pain running on an incline rather than waiting until you can't run at all.

Geier said his biggest piece of advice is to listen to your body and not ignore the pain.

"Get out of this mindset: No pain, no gain," he said. "It may be benign. It may not be. It's worth looking into for the cost of an office visit."

Treatment may include rest and physical therapy.

Ross and Geier say it's also important to find out what's causing the problem so you can prevent the injury from recurring.

Geier concedes that many runners' fear of being told they have to stop running often keeps them from going to the doctor.

Schaller needs no convincing. After two years of research into what keeps a runner on the road, he's adopted a holistic approach — including a training plan, proper nutrition and "running and dressing defensively" — and is willing to do what it takes to stay healthy.

"I have a solution for overuse injuries. It's called an afternoon nap on the couch," Schaller joked.

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RESOURCES

ARE YOU HURTING?

Answering the following questions will help you determine if you're injured or just extremely sore:

- Did your pain come on gradually, or did it seem to pop up out of thin air?
- Can you explain why you're having pain or soreness?
- Did you step in a hole or slightly twist an ankle, thinking nothing of it when it happened?
- Have you been increasing your mileage without thought of proper periodization?

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Running Injury-Free. By Damon Martin with Bob Schaller.



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