

PREVENT WALKING INJURIES

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Choosing a good walking surface is important to avoid injury. The best surfaces are flat, firm, and not too hard. Avoid concrete if at all possible. This is the hardest walking surface. Hills and cambered roads can also be a source of high stress on joints.

If walking on a road with an obvious camber it is a good idea to walk out and back on the same side. A beach or track with a slant has the same issues. Change your direction frequently to avoid too much pressure on one leg.

If you walk on a harder surface out of necessity, be sure to wear well cushioned shoes. If walking on a rocky natural terrain choose a good hiking boot.

Runner's World ranked the following surfaces on a scale of 1 (awful) to 10 (best):

- Grass - 9.5
- Wood chips - 9
- Dirt - 8
- Cinder track - 7.5
- Track - 7
- Treadmill - 6.5
- Asphalt - 6
- Sand - 4
- Snow - 2.5

SHINS ACHE?

You are not alone. Aching shins is a very common complaint for new walkers. It can also be a problem for walkers increasing their speed or distance. Shin pain (generally referred to as shin splints) is caused from too much stress on weak shin muscles. This pain may be caused by many things including shoes with too high a heel or inflexible sole, weak shins or calves, tight shins or calves, striding out too far in front of your body, increasing speed or distance too rapidly, muscle imbalances or gait problems.

Symptoms can include throbbing, tenderness, and aching from below the knee to the ankle. The pain is normally worse early in the morning and at the beginning of your walk, and can gradually get better as your walk progresses.

Prevention and treatment:

Warm up by walking at a slower pace at the beginning of each walk. Then perform ankle circles (rotate ankle ten times in one direction, then ten times in opposite direction) and toe points (point toes, then flex foot - ten times on each foot) to get your muscles loosened up. Do the ankle circles and toes points several times each day, or write the alphabet in the air with your toes.

Stretch your calves, shins, and achilles tendon after every walk. Tight muscles make the shin work harder to lift your foot.

Cross train (biking, swimming, etc.) once or twice a week.

Replace your shoes when needed and choose the right shoe for your foot. Walkers should always choose flexible shoes with a low heel to produce the rolling motion needed for fitness walking. If you over pronate be sure to wear shoes that correct for this problem.

Choose a good walking surface. Avoid concrete if at all possible. If you walk on a road with an obvious camber try walking out and back on the same side of the road to avoid putting too much stress on one leg.

Increase your mileage and speed gradually. The general rule of thumb is to increase mileage at a rate of 10% each week.

Be sure that you are not overstriding.

Perform exercises to strengthen calves and shins.

If you are currently having shin pain you may need to take a day or two of rest and start back more slowly. Remember RICE: **R**est, **I**ce, **C**ompression and **E**levation (and Ibuprofen works wonders).

If you are doing all of the above and the problem does not get better see a sports medicine doctor or podiatrist.

A PAIN IN THE FOOT

Plantar Fasciitis

The plantar fascia is the tissue that runs along the bottom of your foot from the heel to the toes. Plantar fasciitis is simply when this tissue is inflamed and irritated. After prolonged irritation it is also possible to develop a bone spur on the heel.

When the fascia is strained, it usually becomes painful where the fascia is attached to the heel-bone. The heel hurts when walking, running, or even standing. It also hurts when the sole of your foot is stretched, for instance if you pull your foot and toes backwards towards you with your hands.

Some causes of plantar fasciitis include:

- Sudden weight gain
- Poor shoe fit
- Overpronation
- Wearing heels during the day and flats in the evening
- Starting or increase in fitness activities
- Tight muscles

HOW TO PREVENT CHAFING AND BLISTERS

Chafing -

Chafing often occurs on the inner thigh, groin area, armpits, nipples, etc. as a result of sweating, and friction from body parts rubbing together, or friction from clothing. The best treatment for

chafing is prevention.

Stay hydrated - Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Among other things, staying well hydrated will help prevent chafing by allowing you to perspire freely. When you stop perspiring your sweat will form salt crystals on your body increasing friction.

Clothing - Select snug fitting (but not tight) clothing. Shorts or jog bras that are too tight or too loose will create friction and rubbing.

Choose breathable, wicking fabrics Coolmax, Supplex, Polypro, etc are good choices. No cotton!

Clothing should have few seams, flat seams, and small flat stitching.

Do not wear untested clothing on a long walk and never wear unwashed new clothing.

Stay Dry - Use talcum powder or cornstarch to stay dry. (Gold Bond is highly recommended and can be found in most drug stores. Two Toms [Blister shield](#) is another good option.)

Lubricant - When you increase your mileage all other efforts may fail. It is time for real preventative. There are a variety of lubricants on the market. They are readily available at most running stores. Many people use petroleum jelly because it is inexpensive and easy to find. I don't really like the consistency, and find it doesn't stay on as well as many of the sports/running products. The Runners Lube that I use comes in a stick, goes on smoothly, stays on well, and a stick last forever. It is well worth the \$\$.

Blisters -

Blisters are also caused by friction, heat and sweating. Most of the same preventative measures apply, but walkers will try almost anything to prevent blisters.

Stay hydrated - Same as above, be sure to stay properly hydrated including sodium replacement if needed.

Shoes - As with many other walking ailments, begin with the shoes. Your shoes must fit properly to avoid blisters. Too snug or too loose is always a problem. Ensure that there is ½ inch space between your longest toe and the end of your shoe. Be sure that you have enough room to wiggle your toes inside the toe box, and your heel does not slip when you walk.

Choose shoes that breath well. I like shoes with a lot of fabric or mesh combined with leather rather than a solid leather shoe.

Inspect the inside of your shoes for seams or worn areas that might produce extra friction.

Socks - Select socks that fit your foot without being too tight or too loose. Stay away from tube socks as they don't fit close enough to the foot.

Choose soft wicking fabric such as coolmax (NO cotton). Cotton absorbs moisture and is usually a little rough in texture. Ensure that the socks do not have bulky stitching at the toes or heels. Thorlo, WigWam, and Thermolite are a few of the popular brands.

Some people choose to wear two layers of socks (or a sock that is made with double layers) to aid in blister prevention.

Do not wear socks that are too worn. Thin areas and holes are very likely to produce hot spots and blisters.

Do not wear untested socks on a long walk and never wear unwashed socks. Also follow manufacturer's laundering instructions for the best results.

When walking distance carry a spare pair of socks. Change during your walk if your feet become sweaty or wet. (Tip: dust the inside of your spare socks with talcum powder and place in a ziplock bag inside your fanny pack.)

Stay Dry - Using powder along with the right sock can really help. Use foot powder, talcum powder, or cornstarch to stay dry. (Try Gold Bond or Dr. Scholls foot powder.)