

5 Tips for Injury Prevention for Your 5K

You've been training for weeks, maybe months for this upcoming race. You feel like you've hit your stride and you just crushed your personal best time. But that pain in your shin has not gone away. "It's probably nothing. I'll just try and run through it," you say to yourself. Fast-forward a few weeks and now the pain is worse and the race is a month away. You see your doctor and he gives you horrible news. "The pain isn't going to go away without a period of rest," he says. "I think you need to shut it down." These are the dreaded words a runner does not want to hear. Being a sports medicine physician, I've unfortunately had to be the bearer of bad news many times.

The general rule of thumb is to watch the pain for a few days, maybe a week. If it's severe, see your doctor right away. If it's not severe but the pain worsens, you should seek professional help. Let's hope you never get to that point. Here are a few things you can do to help prevent an injury from happening in the first place:

1. Warm up before you warm up. Sounds strange? Many people think warming up means going straight into stretching. You don't want to stretch a cold muscle. Warming up helps the blood flow to your muscles, tendons, and ligaments and helps loosen them up. Try a brisk walk or light jog for 5 minutes. The level of activity should be light enough for you to have a conversation.

2. Warmed up? Now it's time for stretching. Remember the type of stretching you learned in gym class, the kind where you bounce up and down or back and forth. These are called ballistic stretches and I want you to stay away from them. Instead, try incorporating some dynamic stretches. In dynamic stretching, you move through a range of motion deliberately and smoothly without holding the pose. It is the opposite of static stretching where you hold a pose to stretch a muscle. Dynamic stretches help with strength and flexibility and have been shown in some research studies to improve power/performance compared to other stretches. A quick search on YouTube will give you a ton of tutorials. Some good examples are the inchworm, butt kicks, and walking lunges.

3. Don't forget your cool down routine after your run. Here's where you can use your static stretches to help you cool down. It shouldn't take you longer than 5-10 minutes.

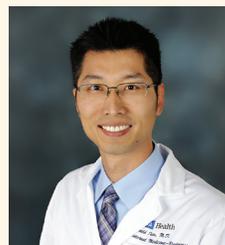
4. Never run a race with new shoes that have not been properly broken in. It can lead to blisters, tendinitis, and even stress fractures. The shoe should feel good when you first try them on.



Don't expect to fix poor fitting shoes by breaking them in. First walk around the house with them or maybe run some errands. Wear them to work if possible. If they fit well and you don't have any pain, then try jogging/running in them. Try running in them once or twice a week for the first two weeks, then gradually increase the amount of miles in your new pair of shoes.

5. Lastly, gradually increase your intensity (how hard you run) and volume (how much you run). Most injuries occur from doing too much too soon. Your body needs time to rest and adapt to the increase in intensity and volume in your training. A good rule of thumb to follow is to increase your mileage no more than 5-10% each week. You should also not be running everyday. Your legs need time to rest and recover. Try running 3-4 times a week and cross train on the days you don't run. It's also a good idea to incorporate one rest day a week.

Hopefully with these tips, you can avoid having a setback in your training and get another personal best on race day.



Ron Tsao, MD

Internal Medicine, Pediatrics,
Sports Medicine

UCLA Health Redondo Beach
Phone: (310) 937-8555

Uclahealth.org/southbay