

New Year, New You, New Feet?

Here we are in 2012. Like many of us, you may have made a New Year's resolution to get healthy. Many of you will start exercising for the first time in a long time. Perhaps many of you are using the winter to strength train and get ready for the spring sports season. During your pursuit of health, happiness, and a new body, it is important to not forget about your foot and ankle health. For some people, the many benefits that exercise can offer may come at a steep price – injury. Particularly people who overdo exercise, who do not properly train, or who do not warm up sufficiently before exercise. Prevention of injuries is the key to success in the realm of health and weight loss. You do not want to be benched before you even get in the game.

Here we will briefly discuss the types of exercise and sports related injuries I have been seeing in the office. Each injury is easily preventable but once an injury manifests and especially if it is not treated in a timely manner can become a costly chronic problem. A podiatric physician and a physical therapist will work together to help you return to pain free function and help you return to the activities you enjoy.

- **Plantar Fasciitis (heel pain)** – It is caused by inflammation of the connective tissue that stretches from the base of the toes, across the arch of the foot, to the point at which it inserts in the heel bone (the sole of your foot). Inflammation is caused by overuse, excessive foot flattening, and is aggravated by tight calf muscles. Aerobic activities- such as walking or running- are usually related to this injury, but it can also be a result of basketball, football, volleyball, etc. Stretching, icing, proper shoes, and orthotics (custom devices worn in shoes for foot support) may be prescribed to help alleviate pain. Foot pain is not normal. See a podiatrist right away if you experience this problem.
- **Ankle Sprain** – This is another common injury I see in my office. The ankle is surrounded by ligaments which are bands of tough, fibrous tissue that connect two or more bones at the joint and prevent excessive motion or movement of the joint. It is these ligaments that are injured in a sprain. If you find that during your exercise, your foot turns in or turns out leaving your ankle painful, red, hot and swollen, immediately stop the activity. The joint should be rested, iced, compressed with an ace wrap, and elevated. Sprains that do not show improvement in three days time should be seen by a podiatric physician. Early comprehensive treatment is important for prevention of long term problems. Just investing in 5-10 minutes of stretching and warming up and wearing the correct shoes for your activity and foot type, can help prevent this common athletic injury.
- **Tendonitis** – This common type of injury is defined as an inflammation of the tendons. Tendons connect muscles to bones. The most common I see - Achilles Tendonitis -is where inflammation is located at the back of the leg where the tendon attaches to the foot at the back of the heel. In sports, a tendonitis injury is usually the result of abnormal foot biomechanics, like excessive foot pronation which is the tendency of the arch of the foot to flatten out too much. A history of overuse in a specific sport or activity which requires continuous high-impact repetitive movements can also be to blame as well. Proper and adequate stretching and warm up can help

prevent this painful condition. Contact a podiatrist if the pain does not improve or worsens after a few days of rest and ice therapy.

- **Stress Fractures** – These are hairline breaks resulting from repeated stress on bone. High-impact sports such as running, zumba, and volleyball, etc. can increase the risk of stress fractures. To prevent stress fractures, wear shoes that provide sufficient padding and support when you walk, run, dance or perform any other activities that impact the bones of the feet. If continued pain persists, contact your podiatrist.

- **The Following Precautions Should Be Taken To Prevent Injuries:**

- Don't be a "weekend warrior", packing a week's worth of activity into a day or two. Try to maintain a moderate level of activity throughout the week.
- It is extremely important for anyone participating in any form of exercise to properly warm up prior to starting or engaging in the activity.
- Get educated about your sport or exercise. Using proper form can reduce your risk of overuse injuries such as tendonitis and stress fractures. Podiatrists and Physical Therapists are a great resource.
- Accept your body's limits. You may not be able to perform at the same level you did 10 or 20 years ago, nor will you recover as quickly. Modify activities as necessary.
- Increase your exercise level gradually; strive for a total body workout of cardiovascular, strength training, and flexibility exercises. Cross-training reduces injury while promoting total fitness.
- Do not believe in "no pain, no gain". Whether an injury is acute or chronic, there is never a good reason to try to "work through" the pain of an injury. When you have pain from an activity – STOP and GET IT CHECKED! Foot pain is not normal and not something you have to live with. See your local podiatrist!