

AthletiHINTS



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Overuse Injuries

Introduction

Overuse injuries occur, as the name states, as a result of overuse. These injuries can occur in virtually any part of the body. Unlike other injuries, there is not a specific incident that causes harm. Overuse injuries occur over a prolonged period and are the result of an accumulation of very minor injuries.

Onset

Overuse injuries typically occur in individuals who perform repetitive activities such as typing, factory work, running, golf, or racquet sports. Symptoms usually start out as minor soreness after activity. As the injury progresses, the individual experiences pain with activity, and eventually the ability to perform the task is impaired. Overuse injuries can also occur with a sudden increase in a person's activity level. The athlete that drastically increases his or her training regimen and the weekend warrior who goes from sitting on the couch to playing softball or golf three times a week are both at risk.

Types of Overuse Injuries

The following is a list of some common overuse injuries.

Tennis Elbow (lateral epicondylitis)

Pain at the outside of the elbow that is produced by grasping objects with the hand and by extending the wrist. This injury is caused by trauma to the muscles that bend the wrist back.

Golfer's Elbow (medial epicondylitis)

Similar to tennis elbow, but this injury occurs on the inside of the elbow. Pain is produced by grasping objects with the hand and by flexing the wrist.

Shin Splints (medial tibial stress syndrome)

Pain along the inside of the shin that occurs frequently in running athletes. This syndrome is the result of excessive stress being placed on the calf musculature. Precipitating factors include inappropriate footwear and having flat feet.

Jumper's Knee (patellar tendonitis)

Pain in the front of the knee that is produced by jumping. This condition is caused by excessive stress being placed on the tendon that straightens the knee.

Stress Fractures

Very small fractures that can occur in weight-bearing bones. Typically, stress fractures occur in the feet of an athlete that increases his or her activity level. Stress fractures will not show up on an X-ray immediately, but will show on a bone scan within 24 hours.

Prevention

Prevention is the best treatment of overuse injuries. Maintaining flexibility by stretching before and after activity is critical in reducing the stress placed upon muscles and tendons. Stretches should be held for 30 seconds and repeated three times for each muscle group. While stretching, it is important to do long, sustained stretches without bouncing.

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Adequate strength is also necessary to improve the body's ability to resist and absorb force. Strength training should focus on using light weights and performing high repetitions. The appropriate weight is one that can be lifted between eight and 12 repetitions for at least three sets.

An additional preventative measure is to increase training gradually. This is necessary for the body to be able to adapt to increased workload. A general rule is to increase training distance or weight by no more than 10 percent every week.

High quality equipment to absorb force and shock can also greatly reduce the risk of overuse injuries. Athletes who participate in racquet sports should purchase shock-reducing devices. Runners should purchase new shoes every 500 miles. This can be between three and six months, depending upon distance and frequency of running.

Conclusion

Overuse injuries are common among athletes and can result in a significant loss of playing time when not managed properly. The best treatment, as with any injury, is prevention. Nevertheless, if symptoms of pain after activity do develop, these symptoms should be treated immediately. Being aware of overuse injuries and taking a few simple precautions against them will significantly reduce your risk of suffering an overuse injury.