LOCAL MOTION

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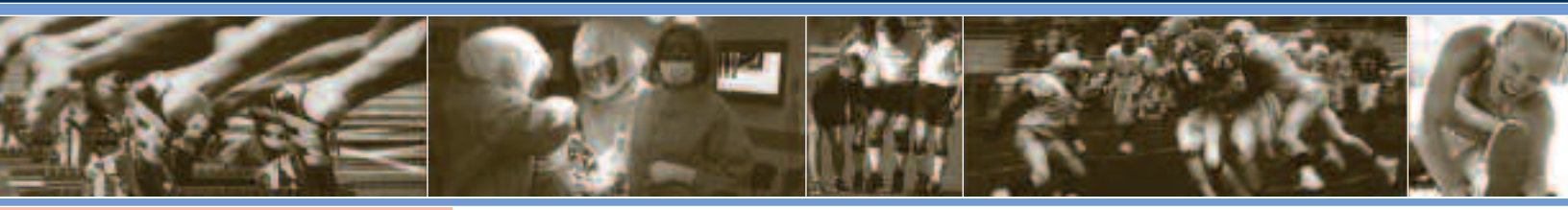

SPORTS MEDICINE INJURY CLINIC
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IN THIS ISSUE

Don't just assume "Shin Splints"
Lower Leg Pain May Be More Serious

By Robyn Vargo DO and Peter Drab ATC

"Activities involving repetitive jumping or long distance running can cause pain along the front of the leg bone between the knee and the ankle. Tenderness can be felt along the inside of the shin bone, called the tibia, or along the adjacent muscles and is commonly referred to as 'shin splints'," explains Dr. Robyn Vargo.

The inflammation and soreness associated with "shin splints" can develop from over-use, starting a new activity, high impact activities on hard surfaces or from lack of proper warm-up. Athletes who have a flatter arch are more susceptible than others.

Symptoms include pain with activity or following activity, warmth and swelling. "Shin splints" often occur in both legs at the same time. If only one leg is persistently painful or if tenderness is localized to a small isolated area of the bone (size of a dime or a quarter), a stress fracture may be present and should be evaluated by a physician.

Treatment includes R.I.C.E (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation), three to four times a day. Using an ice cup to perform an ice massage for five to seven minutes usually works best, but an ice bag wrapped on the leg can sooth the pain as well. Consideration of modifying or removal from activities that increase pain should be made to facilitate healing. Increasing the flexibility and strength (eccentric) of the calf muscles can aid healing and resolution of symptoms. If the athlete has flat arches, orthotics may be considered by the physician if abnormal mechanics seem to be playing a significant role. Additionally, worn out shoes must be replaced with new supportive ones.

Successful prevention of "shin splints" for any athlete is a good warm-up, followed by light stretching before and after activity followed by ice at the end of activity. The body needs time to adjust to moderate increases in time, distance, and/or intensity of running and jumping activities. Eccentric strengthening exercises for the soleus have also been helpful.

Should you have any further questions regarding the treatment or prevention of "shin splints", contact your high school certified athletic trainer or team physician.