

Women and Stress Fractures

Men and women obviously differ physiologically, and those differences can leave women more susceptible to certain running injuries. There are things you can do to reduce the risk, however.

Women seem particularly susceptible to one of the more frustrating running injuries, stress fractures (hairline bone breaks). According to Brian Fullem, D.P.M., a sports podiatrist in Newtown, CT, the most common stress-fracture sites are the tibia (shin bone) and metatarsals in the foot. Common causes of stress fractures include running in worn-out shoes, increasing the amount or intensity of the running you do on hard surfaces, and doing speed sessions on an indoor track, where the surface often is hard and the turns tight.

Why are women more prone to stress fractures? Fullem believes that factors include a history of amenorrhea (lack of menstrual periods), too little body mass in the legs, and a diet that's too low in fat and calcium.

To reduce your risk, replace your shoes every 300 to 400 miles, try to run on softer surfaces (such as dirt, cinders, or an all-weather track) and put 1,000 milligrams (mg) of calcium into your diet each day (without supplementing more than 500 mg daily). "Most important," he says, "do not try to run through pain." If you're feeling pain and it increases as the run progresses and becomes focused over one spot, you may have developed a stress fracture. If an x-ray is negative, a bone scan is the best way to diagnose a stress fracture.