

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Foot Stress Fractures

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Stress fractures occur in many parts of the body. Today we are limiting our attention to stress fractures of the foot. They have certain aspects in common with other stress fractures, but today you will only learn about those in the foot.

What It Is

A stress fracture is simply a tiny crack that starts in the bone caused by a repetitive over load of the bone.

People who suddenly begin a serious walking program or a running workout program without gradually building up to it are prime candidates for stress fractures.

People who quickly increase intensity or distance of their exercise or who switch from running on soft surfaces to hard surfaces often develop stress fractures.

Even your athletic shoes can cause the problem if they are too worn out to give your foot support or if they don't fit right.

Where

The most common spot for a foot stress fracture is the metatarsal bones, which are the long bones connected to the toes.

How It Feels

Pain and swelling are common as with other types of fractures. The symptoms develop more gradually and are less severe than with a fracture due to a fall or direct blow.

As you bear weight on your feet the pain increases and it is relieved by rest.

Call Sooner Than Later

If you have these symptoms don't delay having it checked. These fractures get progressively worse the longer they exist. Waiting in this case to see if the pain will go away is a bad idea.

The ideal situation is someone I see whose plain x-ray does not yet show a fracture! If I strongly feel it is a stress fracture from history and exam I will always get a bone scan and nine times out of ten, there it is! This is way better than seeing a plain x-ray with the bone broken all the way through and the person has had symptoms for a month.

There is a far greater chance of good healing if the diagnosis is made when a bone scan shows it before plain x-rays.

Treatment

I usually prescribe a boot like device called an air cast walking brace. Sometimes a cane or crutch is also needed. If the fracture refuses to heal after six to eight weeks a bone stimulator unit might be needed. These fractures can be very stubborn and hard to heal on occasion and each case is different. I don't like to predict time of healing.

Prevention

- Fairly simple: Build up very gradually when you exercise.
- Wear very good supporting athletic shoes.
- Orthotics can really be beneficial if you have some known foot and ankle problems.
- Lastly, don't ignore symptoms if they occur.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

Don't forget to check out the entirely new office website, www.orthopodsurgeon.com, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive of all back articles. It is a wealth of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush