

FIX INJURIES FASTER!

THESE EXPERT-BACKED TIPS WILL SPEED UP HEALING SO YOU CAN STAY ON THE ROAD AND RECOVER QUICKLY. BY ASHLEY MATEO

1 PIRIFORMIS SYNDROME
WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / A literal pain in the butt—more specifically, pain, cramping, and tingling in the glute muscles that may extend down the back

of the leg and into the foot.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Weak glutes (due to too much sitting) or repetitive movement (like running) fatigue the piriformis muscle, which is responsible for external rotation of the hip joint, and can result in compression of the nearby sciatic nerve.

THE FIX / Floss the sciatic nerve to relieve compression: Sit on the left edge of a stool so left leg can move freely. Tilt head back, bend left leg back toward glute, and point left foot. Hold. Then extend left leg, flex foot upward, and tilt chin to chest. Hold. Tilt head back, bend knee, and point foot again. Do 2 sets of 10 on each side.

2. BLISTERS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / A burning sensation, accompanied by pain, redness, or itching.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Friction, usually caused by your shoes or socks rubbing against your skin. Anything that intensifies rubbing can start a blister, including a faster pace, poor-fitting or new shoes, and foot abnormalities such as bunions, heel spurs, and hammertoes.

THE FIX / Drain the blister using a sterilized needle, then cover with a tight, clean bandage; try synthetic, moisture-wicking socks to avoid blisters in the future.

NO MATTER HOW CAREFUL YOU ARE, RUNNING TAKES A TOLL ON YOUR BODY: A 10-minute mile consists of around 1,700 steps, each one producing ground reaction forces two-and-a-half times your body weight, on average. That's a huge load for you to absorb—and probably why 20 percent of runners are likely to experience an injury while training for an event, according to research in the journal *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*. Plus, a recent survey published in *PLoS ONE* of 1,147 runners suggests that during the pandemic, runners are running more but with less intensity and still experiencing more injuries. Knee issues, IT-band syndrome, ankle instability, and back pain are among the most common to plague us. If you're feeling pain that falls at a 6 or 7 on a scale of 1 to 10, interferes with your daily life, or lingers for more than two weeks, get yourself to a doc, says Cat Fitzgerald, D.P.T., a physical therapist at Custom Performance in New York City. To troubleshoot aches and niggles at home, try these remedies from Fitzgerald, Jay Dicharry, M.P.T., a biomechanics researcher, and Jordan Metz, M.D., a sports medicine physician at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City.



3

SHIN SPLINTS

a.k.a. medial tibial stress syndrome

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / A nagging pain concentrated in the front or outside of your leg along the shin bone (tibia); it usually flares during and after exercise and when you press on the affected area.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Repetitive stress on the shinbone and the connective tissues causes microscopic tearing of the muscle away from the bone,

generally as a result of activity load (as when upping your mileage too quickly) and body mechanics (especially overstriding).

THE FIX / Learn to control the eccentric deceleration of your foot to the ground: Loop a mini band around feet and step feet apart until you feel resistance; flex one foot so toes lift off the ground, then slowly lower toes back to the ground. Repeat. Do 3 sets of 10 reps on each foot.

4

HAMSTRING STRAIN

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Pain at the top of the hamstrings near the glutes while running, especially when you're running uphill or doing speedwork.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Overly dominant quads pull the pelvis into forward tilt, which overlengthens the hamstrings, and/or weak hips and glutes put too much load on the muscle,

which can cause microtears in the muscle that subsequently develop scar tissue, leading to chronic stiffness and discomfort.

THE FIX / Increase the amount of load your hamstrings can handle with bridge walk-outs: Lie faceup on a mat with knees bent, feet flat on floor, arms resting at sides. Press through heels and engage glutes to lift hips up toward the ceiling without overarching your back. Slowly walk feet out until knees are almost straight or as far as you can keeping hips lifted, then walk feet back in. Slowly lower hips down and repeat. Do 3 sets of 8 reps.

5. IT-BAND SYNDROME

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / An aching, burning pain on the outside of the knee (sometimes spreading up the thigh to the hip) that occurs five to seven minutes into every run.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Overuse, wearing worn-out shoes, pelvic imbalances, and weak glutes can cause the leg to turn inward, irritating the iliotibial band, a thick band of connective tissue that runs from the outside of the hip to the outside of the knee and helps stabilize and move the knee joint.

THE FIX / Strengthen the gluteus medius muscles with hip hikes to keep the pelvis level: Stand sideways on a step, hanging one leg off. Keeping core engaged and the standing leg straight, allow the hanging leg to drop toward the ground by lowering your pelvis on that side as far as possible. Use the hip muscles in the standing leg to raise your pelvis back up. Do 3 sets of 12 reps on each side.

6

BLACK TOENAIL

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Nothing, really, or it may feel swollen and sore.

WHY IT HAPPENS / During the push-off phase of your gait, the toes on your trailing foot extend up and hit the toebox of your shoe,

causing repetitive microtrauma that adds up over your run and can lead to bleeding under the nail.

THE FIX / In most cases, do nothing. Just let it grow out. In more extreme cases with constant pain, don't treat it at home; see a doc who can drain it within the first few days. If the nail falls off, use an antibiotic ointment and a bandage to prevent infection.

7

LOWER BACK PAIN

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Muscle-related pain on either side of the lower part of your spine; you may feel spasms or pain on either side of your spine, especially when you twist or move.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Tightness in the hamstrings and front of the hips and weakness in the muscles that surround your back—your core, hips, glutes, and hamstrings—rotate your pelvis forward, making it impossible to engage and stabilize your core and putting the burden on your lower back instead.

THE FIX / Foam-roll your main running muscles to release the pressure on your lower back: Roll your lower back, glutes, quads, IT bands, hamstrings, and calves for 20 seconds each, then repeat that sequence three times for a total of 60 seconds of rolling on each body part.



Trigger Point Grid Foam Roller, \$40



8. ANKLE PAIN

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / A sharp, shooting pain or a constant, dull ache along either side of your ankle.

WHY IT HAPPENS / Weakness anywhere up and down the kinetic chain (above or below the hip, and especially the gluteus medius muscle) can cause instability and vulnerability at the ankle as you repeatedly load the joint; rolling the ankle, usually inward, can lead to partially or fully torn ligaments.

THE FIX / Build your ankle stability with pass-backs: Stand on the floor holding a five- to 15-pound weight, or a full gallon jug of water, and shift weight to one leg. Pass the weight back and forth from one hand to the other while aiming to keep stable at the ankle joint. The faster you go, the harder this gets. Aim for 2 minutes total on each foot, taking breaks as needed.



9 **STRESS FRACTURE**
WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Aching or burning localized pain somewhere along a bone; the area will hurt if you press on it, and the pain will get progressively worse as you run on it.
WHY IT HAPPENS / Too much loading force on the bone, typically due to overuse or ramping up your mileage too quickly.
THE FIX / Learn how to rest! Stress fractures can take four to eight weeks to heal, depending on the severity. Continuing to run on one will only prolong the healing process or worsen the injury. Use this time to do low-impact cross-training, such as swimming or biking, with clearance from your doctor.

10. PLANTAR FASCIITIS

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / A sharp stab or deep ache in the heel or along the arch of the foot, especially in the morning, after sitting for long periods of time, or during the push-off phase of your gait.
WHY IT HAPPENS / Drastic or sudden increases in mileage, tight calves, overpronation, and inappropriate running shoes can overload the plantar fascia (the connective tissue that runs from your heel to the base of your toes); that stress can cause tiny tears in the plantar fascia, causing heel pain and inflammation.
THE FIX / Strengthen the foot muscles, specifically in the arch, with toe yoga: Remove your socks and shoes and stand tall on both feet. Splay your toes and feet out so weight is distributed evenly. While keeping toes two to five down, lift just your big toe. (It's harder than it sounds!) Hold for 2 seconds while keeping the small toes relaxed. Lower and repeat 20 times. Then switch and keep your big toe down while lifting toes two to five up; be sure to not let the foot pronate (roll inward). Hold for 2 seconds. Lower and repeat 20 times.

Engage your core to keep the movement in your glutes, not your lower back.



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RUNNER'S KNEE *a.k.a. patellofemoral pain syndrome*

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Aching pain around or behind the knee cap, especially when running down stairs or descending steep hills.
WHY IT HAPPENS / Abnormal mechanics caused by problems up- or downstream from the knee. Think: weak posterior hip muscles that rotate the leg inward, forcing the patella to bump against the femoral groove; this is (surprise!) exacerbated by overuse.
THE FIX / Activate your glutes and relearn hip extension with grasshopper exercises: Lie on stomach and rest chin on hands. Spread knees apart as far as you can on the floor and bring toes together in the air so both sets of toes are pointing up at the ceiling. Lift thighs up off the ground as high as you can (it will only be a few inches, max) while keeping torso on the ground. Lower back down. Do 3 sets of 15 reps.



12. PAIN ON TOP OF FOOT

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE / Irritation on the top of your foot, or a sharp pain that shoots up through your foot into your toes.
WHY IT HAPPENS / Shoes that are too small or too tight around the forefoot cause irritation on the top of the foot or neuromas, inflamed or swollen nerves near the metatarsals.
THE FIX / Loosen your laces or look for shoes with a wide toebox for more room in the forefoot. During downtime, use Yoga Toes (\$30) to stretch and separate your toes out of that crunched position.