

# 6 Common Running Injuries to Avoid

By Beth Dreher  
*Runner's World*

The only thing runners fear more than rabid dogs and porta-potty emergencies is getting hurt. An injury means taking a break, and runners hate the thought of losing fitness, gaining weight, or missing an endorphin fix. But what if you knew what injuries you were likely to face — before a single symptom struck?

Sports physician Jack Taunton, M.D., and exercise scientist Michael Ryan, both recreational runners from the University of British Columbia, were studying sports injuries four years ago when they recognized a lack of data linking specific traits, weight, gender, foot type — to running injuries. So they decided to conduct research that was later published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. "We found that certain injuries were statistically more significant among particular people," Ryan says. "Women are more likely to experience one kind of knee pain — patellofemoral pain syndrome — while men are more likely to experience another — patellar tendonitis."

Ryan and Taunton's findings focus on six injuries and the runners they most commonly afflict. Whether you're in a high-risk group or not, simple training adjustments can keep you safe. These precautionary measures could save you from the dreaded routine of rest and rehab.

## **Achilles Tendinitis**

### **What It Is**

Tenderness in your lower calf near your heel that usually strikes when you push off your toes

### **You're at Risk**

Men with a BMI of 25 or higher (a man who is 5'10" and weighs 175 pounds, for example) who run a nine-minute-per-mile pace or faster

### **Why**

The Achilles absorbs several times your body weight with each stride. A faster pace and additional body weight put even more stress on this tendon.

### **Prevent It**

Strengthen your calf muscles (with your toes on a step, lower and raise your heels). Stretch your calves (keep your heel on the ground, lift your toes back toward your shin).

### **Others at Risk**

People who regularly run hills (the Achilles has to stretch more on inclines) and who have increased their mileage more than 10 percent per week (sudden increases in mileage strain the tendon)

## **Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome**

### **What It Is**

Pain and soreness along the inside front of the lower leg, commonly called shinsplints

### **You're at Risk**

Runners whose feet roll inward excessively (overpronate)

### **Why**

The posterior tibial tendon, the connective tissue that gets sore with shinsplints, runs into the arch of the foot. If your feet roll inward, this tendon has to work extra hard to counteract that motion.

### **Prevent It**

Wear motion-control shoes. Strengthen your calves (hold dumbbells while doing toe raises). If you've had daily shin pain for longer than a month, see a doctor for a bone scan to rule out a stress fracture.

**Others at Risk**

Beginning runners; people who train on slanted surfaces; women who wear high heels

**Patellar Tendinitis****What It Is**

Pain in the tendon that connects the kneecap to the shinbone

**You're at Risk**

Men with a BMI of 25 or higher or who have a history of playing basketball and have suddenly increased their weekly mileage

**Why**

The patellar tendon helps your leg extend during running or jumping, but that repeated motion can create small tears in the tendon. After years of activity and then a sudden increase in mileage, your body may struggle to repair those tears. Extra body weight doesn't help.

**Prevent It**

Keep your weight in check. Do squats to strengthen the patellar tendon and stretch your quads and hamstrings. Avoid increasing mileage by more than 10 percent per week.

**Others at Risk**

Runners with a history of tendon injuries; overpronators

**Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome****What It Is**

Pain and stiffness around the kneecap You're at Risk Women who run a 10-minute-per-mile pace or slower

**Why**

Ideally, your kneecap glides smoothly in the groove at the end of your thighbone. But because women have more flexible joints and a more extreme angle from hip to knee (called the Q angle) than men, their kneecaps are more likely to fall out of alignment. Pain intensifies at slower speeds because the knee goes through less range of motion, putting more demand on a smaller area of the joint.

**Prevent It**

Strengthen your quads, hamstrings, and glutes with squats and lunges to stabilize your kneecaps and help keep the pelvis level while you run.

**Others at Risk**

Runners who overpronate, have flat feet or high arches

**Iliotibial-Band Syndrome****What It Is**

Inflammation in the band of fibers that runs along the outside of the knee to the top of the shin

**You're at Risk**

Women with a BMI of 21 (weighing 135 at 5'7", for example) or higher who do a weekly long run of two hours or more and run hills often

**Why**

Extra body weight puts a heavier load on the hips and more pressure on the IT band. Long runs fatigue the muscles that help stabilize women's hips. The hips sag more than normal on each step, straining the band. During a hill workout, the knee stays bent longer, which also increases tension in the IT band.

**Prevent It**

Strengthen the muscles around the IT band with leg walking (loop a resistance band around both ankles and walk sideways in one direction, then the other). Use a foam roller to loosen the band.

**Others at Risk**

People who run on slanted surfaces; runners with leg-length discrepancies

## **Plantar Fasciitis**

### **What It Is**

Inflammation of the tissue along the bottom of the foot that's usually worst first thing in the morning

### **You're at Risk**

Men over 40 who have a family history of the injury

### **Why**

The make-up of the tissue in the plantar fascia is stiffer in men and gets less flexible with age. Experts think it could be a genetic condition.

### **Prevent It**

The fascia tightens overnight, so stretch your calves before getting out of bed (straighten your legs; flex your toes). Strengthen your calves with toe raises or eccentric heel drops.

### **Others at Risk**

People who wear shoes that lack good arch support (flip-flops, ballet flats); pregnant women