

WHEENK! HEALTH

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO TO CARE FOR YOUR FEET, AS A RUNNER OR JUST A BIPEDAL HUMAN, IS TO LISTEN TO WHAT THEY ARE TRYING TO TELL YOU. WHETHER IT'S A NAGGING PAIN, A BLACK TOENAIL, OR JUST A CALLUS, ALL THESE THINGS ARE INDICATIONS OF A POSSIBLE IMBALANCE OR INJURY. IF YOU IGNORE THE SIGNS. THINGS ARE LIKELY TO GET WORSE.

THE WARNING: BLACK TOENAIL

BLACK TOENAILS, OR "RUNNER'S TOES", FREQUENTLY PLAGUE DISTANCE RUNNERS. THE MOST COMMON CULPRIT IS NOT KEEPING YOUR TOENAILS CLOSELY CLIPPED. IF THE END OF THE TOENAIL JAMS INTO THE SHOE, THE BASE OF THE NAIL WIGGLES ENOUGH TO CAUSE BLEEDING JUST BELOW THE SURFACE. SHOES THAT ARE TOO TIGHT CAN ALSO CAUSE THE PROBLEM: TRY A 1/2 SIZE LARGER OR A SHOE WITH A HIGHER TOE BOX. THE DISCOLORATION CAN ALSO BE A SIGNAL THAT YOU ARE RUNNING TOO MANY DOWNHILLS, SO TRY CHANGING TO MOSTLY FLAT RUNS.

THE BLACK PART OF THE TOENAIL WILL GROW OUT AND FALL OFF IN A FEW MONTHS, BUT SEE A DOCTOR IF YOU ARE IN PAIN.

THE WARNING: CALLUSES

CALLUSES ARE AREAS OF THICKENED SKIN THAT FORM FROM REPETITIVE PRESSURE. CALLUSES ARE AN INDICATION THAT THE FEET ARE GETTING A LOT OF FORCE ON ONE SPOT. OVER PRONATORS OFTEN FIND CALLUSES ON THE INSIDE OF THEIR BIG TOES OR AT THE END OF THEIR TOES. SEVERE OVER PRONATORS ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO ACHILLES TENDINITIS, KNEE PAIN, AND SHIN SPLINTS. CALLUSES THAT DEVELOP ON THE FIFTH TOE OR THE OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT CAN INDICATE SUPINATION. OVER TIME, SUPINATORS STRESS THE OUTSIDE OF THEIR FEET AND ANKLES, WHICH CAN LEAD TO SPRAINS, TENDINITIS, AND STRESS FRACTURES. WEARING THE APPROPRIATE RUNNING SHOES FOR YOUR FEET CAN HELP CORRECT THE PROBLEM. RUNNER'S WHO HAVE ONE FOOT THAT IS MORE CALLUSED THAN THE OTHER MAY HAVE AN IMBALANCE, SUCH AS A LEG-LENGTH DISCREPANCY. IT MAY ALSO INDICATE A STRENGTH IMBALANCE. A PHYSICAL THERAPIST CAN HELP YOU ADDRESS THESE ISSUES WITH AN APPROPRIATE STRENGTHENING AND STRETCHING PROGRAM TO HELP EVEN OUT YOUR GAIT. MORE SEVERE CASES MAY REQUIRE AN ORTHOTIC TO CORRECT THE FOOT'S MOTION.

THE WARNING: BUNIONS

WHEN THE JOINT AT THE BASE OF THE BIG TOE IS UNDER EXTRA PRESSURE, IT CAN SWELL AND FORM A BUNION, WHICH IS A BONY PROTRUSION ON THE SIDE OF THE FOOT. IT MAY BECOME PAINFUL AS THE BIG TOE MOVES OUT OF ALIGNMENT. IN EXTREME CASES, THE BIG TOE OVERLAPS THE SECOND AND THIRD TOES. BUNIONS ARE MOST COMMON IN RUNNERS WHO OVER PRONATE. BUNIONS DON'T HAVE TO HURT. MAKE SURE YOUR SNEAKERS ARE WIDE AND DEEP ENOUGH AT THE TOE BOX, AND AVOID SHOES THAT RUB AGAINST THE PROBLEM JOINT. IF YOU HAVE PAIN OR NOTICE CHANGES IN YOUR BUNIONS CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL. PHYSICAL THERAPY AND ORTHOTICS CAN HELP, BUT SOMETIMES SURGERY IS REQUIRED TO CORRECT SEVERE CASES.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

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THE WARNING: NEUROMA

A NEUROMA IS AN ENLARGED NERVE, WHICH MOST COMMONLY OCCURS IN THE INTERSPACE BETWEEN THE THIRD AND FOURTH TOES. NEUROMAS AREN'T VISIBLE, BUT YOU CAN DEFINITELY FEEL THEM. THEY CAN CAUSE TOE CRAMPS OR A MORE GENERAL PAIN IN THE BALL OF YOUR FOOT. HILL RUNNING, WHICH PUTS ABNORMAL PRESSURE ON THE BALL OF THE FOOT, IS A COMMON CAUSE OF NEUROMAS. IF YOU'RE HAVING PAIN, STICK TO FLAT RUNS UNTIL IT SUBSIDES. MAKE SURE YOUR SHOES AREN'T TOO TIGHT IN THE TOE BOX. REMOVE THE INSERT FROM YOUR SHOE AND STAND ON IT. IF ANY PORTION OF YOUR FOOT IS HANGING OVER THE INSERT, YOUR SHOES ARE TOO SMALL.

THE WARNING: PLANTAR FASCIITIS

PLANTAR FASCIITIS, WHICH CAUSES PAIN IN THE ARCH AND/OR HEEL, OCCURS WHEN THE CONNECTIVE FIBERS THAT RUN ALONG THE BOTTOM OF THE FOOT BECOME INFLAMED. THE PAIN MOST OFTEN OCCURS IN ONE FOOT, AND CAN BE RELATED TO A LEG LENGTH DISCREPANCY OR A STRENGTH IMBALANCE. PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM PLANTAR FASCIITIS OFTEN HAVE WEAK MUSCLES IN THEIR FEET AND/OR TIGHT CALF MUSCLES. PHYSICAL THERAPY CAN HELP WITH THE PAIN AND ADDRESS ANY STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY ISSUES THAT MAY BE CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEM.

* PRONATION IS THE INWARD ROLL OF THE FOOT DURING NORMAL MOTION WHICH OCCURS AS THE OUTER EDGE OF THE HEEL STRIKES THE GROUND AND THE FOOT ROLLS INWARD AND FLATTENS OUT. OVER PRONATORS SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON THE INNER SURFACE OF THEIR FOOT DURING THE GAIT CYCLE.

* SUPINATION IS THE OUTWARD ROLLING OF THE FOOT DURING NORMAL MOTION. SUPINATORS SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON THE OUTER SURFACE OF THEIR FOOT DURING THE GAIT CYCLE.

BY KELLY TOWNSEND, MSPT

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