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RUNNING FROM FOOT PROBLEMS

The subject of barefoot running has received a lot of attention as both a trend as well as a source of foot and ankle injuries. But even experienced walkers and runners who adhere to the use of more traditional footwear can be plagued by common injuries that require treatment by a foot specialist.

Dr. Robert Russo, President of the New York State Podiatric Medical Association, suggests that even the most experienced and well prepared runners and walkers need to be mindful of signals and symptoms that indicate your foot pain requires medical attention.

"A visit to the podiatrist should happen at the first sign of pain or discomfort," said Dr. Russo. "Many people will tolerate pain thinking it is normal and will go away, only to find they have a fracture or other serious injury that requires medical treatment or even surgery," he added.

Start with Prevention

Warming up before starting any form of exercise is recommended. This can help prevent ankle sprains and fractures. So can wearing proper shoes. A foot specialist can help determine which type of shoe is best for you. And it is good to remember that any athletic shoe should be replaced annually. Running shoes should be replaced approximately every 300 – 400 miles.

It is not uncommon for people to wear uncomfortable or ill-fitting

shoes. After all, many people buy their footwear in a setting where there are no experts to ensure proper fit, including online or big-box retailers. So even if you are purchasing expensive athletic shoes, if the fit is not correct or the shoe does not provide adequate support, you may experience foot pain.

Is it a Sprain or a Fracture?

Pain, swelling, bruising and difficulty walking on the affected foot or ankle are the most common symptoms of a sprain or foot fracture. The podiatrist will examine you and take a complete medical history. Tests may be ordered, including an X-ray, ultrasound or MRI, to determine the extent of the injury. If a fracture is clearly visible from the X-ray, further tests may not be necessary. Ultrasounds and MRIs are useful for diagnosing soft tissue injuries like torn ligaments and stress fractures.

What to do First

At the first sign of injury – if it is swollen, bruised, or painful to walk there are several immediate steps recommended by Dr. Russo. The acronym RICE will help you remember:

R = Rest. Stay off the foot until it can be evaluated. Even walking on the affected area can make it worse.

I = Ice. Apply ice as soon as possible and reapply it every 15 – 20 minutes every three or four hours after the injury. Ice can decrease inflammation.

C = Compression. Wrap an elastic bandage around the foot. The wrapping should be snug, but not so tight as to cut off circulation.

E = Elevation. Prop up the foot and ankle using a couple of pillows, ensuring it is higher than your heart. Keeping the foot elevated also helps decrease swelling.

The bottom line: Don't take your feet or pain of any kind for granted. A podiatrist will determine the extent of your injury and develop a plan to get you back on your feet as soon as

possible. To find a foot specialist near you, visit NYSPMA.org and click on the "find a podiatrist" button or call Toll-free, 866-996-4400.

The New York State Podiatric Medical Association is the largest statewide component of the American Podiatric Medical Association and its affiliated national network of certifying boards and professional colleges. Established in 1895, NYSPMA has over 1,200 members across 13 divisions in New York State. Visit www.nyspma.org for more information. The Association is located at 1255 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10029.

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