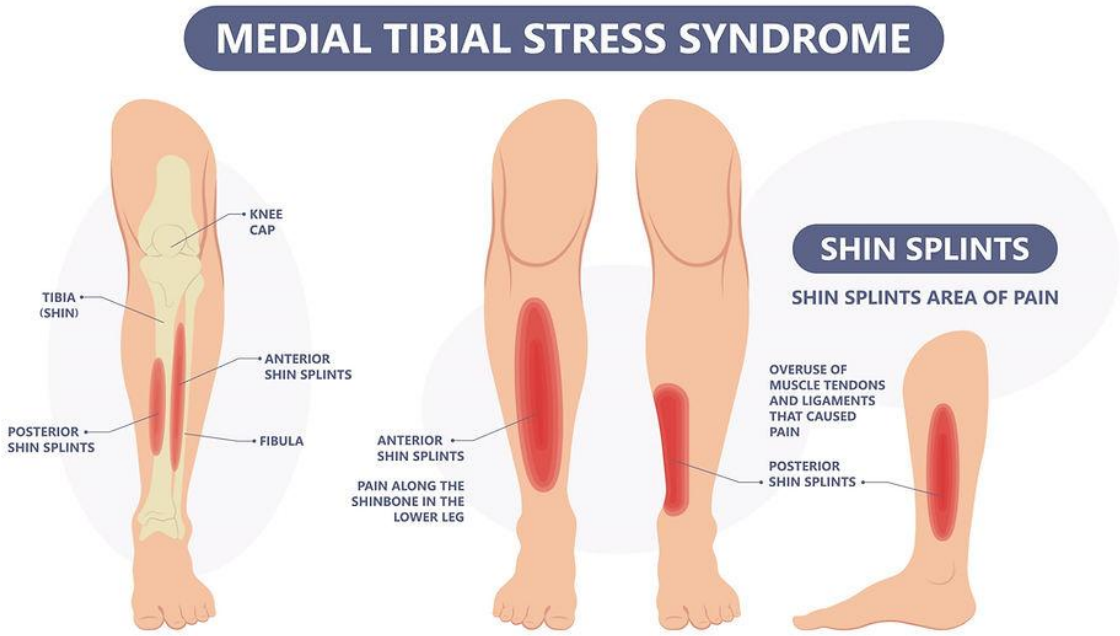
Shin Splints (Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome)



What are shin splints?

Shin splints, also known as **medial tibial stress syndrome**, cause pain along the inner edge of the shin bone (tibia). They are common in people who run, walk long distances, or take part in sports involving repetitive impact.

Shin splints are an overuse condition and usually develop when the muscles, tendons, and bone tissue are overloaded.

Common symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Dull or aching pain along the inner shin
- Pain that starts during exercise and may ease with rest

- Tenderness when pressing on the shin
- Mild swelling in the lower leg

Pain often affects both legs but can be on one side only.

What causes shin splints?

Shin splints usually occur due to a combination of factors, including:

- Sudden increase in training intensity or distance
- Running on hard or uneven surfaces
- Poor or worn-out footwear
- Flat feet or over-pronation
- Tight calf muscles or weak leg muscles
- Poor shock absorption during activity

How are shin splints diagnosed?

Diagnosis is usually based on:

- Your symptoms and activity levels
- Physical examination

Scans are not routinely needed unless symptoms are severe, persistent, or a stress fracture is suspected.

Treatment and management

Shin splints usually improve with simple self-management.

Rest and activity modification

- Reduce or stop activities that increase pain
- Avoid running on hard or sloped surfaces during recovery
- Gradually return to activity once pain settles

Ice and pain relief

- Apply ice packs for 10–15 minutes after activity
- Simple pain relief such as paracetamol may help
- Anti-inflammatory gels can be used if appropriate

Exercise and stretching

- Gentle calf and ankle stretching
- Strengthening exercises for the calves, feet, and hips
- Balance and control exercises

A physiotherapist can provide a tailored exercise programme.

Footwear and support

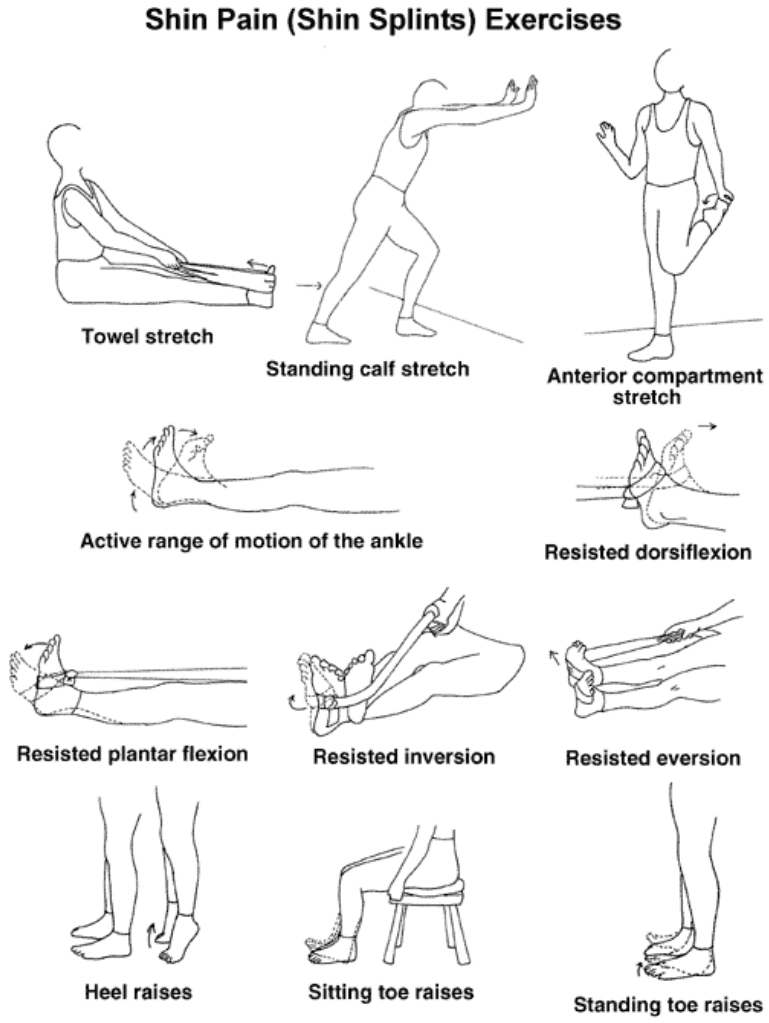
- Wear supportive, well-fitting shoes
- Replace worn-out trainers regularly
- Insoles or orthotics may help some people

How long does recovery take?

Most people improve within **4–8 weeks**, but recovery time varies depending on activity levels and adherence to rehabilitation.

Preventing shin splints

- Increase training gradually
- Warm up before exercise and stretch afterwards
- Vary training surfaces
- Maintain good strength and flexibility
- Wear appropriate footwear



When should I seek further help?

Contact your GP or physiotherapist if:

- Pain does not improve after a few weeks of rest
- Pain occurs at rest or at night
- There is significant swelling or tenderness over a small area

Seek **urgent medical advice** if pain is severe, sudden, or associated with inability to weight-bear.

Key messages

- Shin splints are common and treatable

- Rest and gradual return to activity are important
- Exercise helps recovery when done correctly
- Early management prevents recurrence

If you have any concerns, please speak to your healthcare professional.