

MUSCLE STRAIN — LEG & CALF

Anterior Tibialis (Shin) Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The tibialis anterior runs along the front of the shin and lifts the foot during walking and running. Strains and overuse of this muscle cause front-of-shin pain distinct from shin splints on the inner edge of the bone.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Downhill running, sudden mileage increases, or repetitive braking — the muscle works eccentrically to lower the foot with each step.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Aching or burning along the muscle beside the shin bone, worse when lifting the foot or running downhill; sometimes mild swelling over the muscle.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** 1–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 2–5 weeks
- **Grade III:** 6–8 weeks

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Reduce downhill/braking load, then progressive resisted dorsiflexion strengthening and calf flexibility.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

Graduated mileage, cadence work to soften foot-strike, downhill running introduced progressively.

WHEN TO CALL US

Severe tightness, pain out of proportion, numbness between the first two toes, or pain with passive toe stretch after intense exercise can signal exertional compartment syndrome — stop and call us.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/shin-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.