

Injuries



The best way to deal with injuries is to prevent them. Properly warming up, cooling down and progressively increasing your mileage and intensity is the smartest way to train and stop injuries before they happen. But athletes must also stretch after their runs, drink plenty of water all day long and ice injuries as soon as they happen. Injuries will inevitably occur and both athlete and parent must be on the same team to deal with any injuries that happen.

Injuries in cross country usually don't involve trips in ambulances, broken bones or stitches. They often start as a dull pain that runners can train through and athletes can usually train through most little aches and pains. The first course of action for most injuries is to put ice on the area for 15 minutes at a time, several times a day. If that doesn't help, a few days of cross training may be appropriate. But if the same injury is occurring for several days or if it is causing a runner to change his running form medical help may be required.

A pediatrician probably won't be the best person to see for an athletic injury. It should be someone who is a sports medicine specialist, but remember many doctors will put sports medicine on their qualifications, but they should have experience working with runners. Any good doctor should be able to answer the following questions:

- 1) Specifically what is the injury?
- 2) What may have caused it? This is where he or she should ask for your running shoes or training log.
- 3) What is the best course of treatment? There should be a recommendation of a change in training, new exercises, new footwear, physical therapy or in extreme cases, time off. Stress fractures and Achilles tendonitis, are two injuries that must be given immediate time off from running.
- 4) What should you watch for to see if you are getting better or worse? Are there specific activities or movements you should not do? Biking might be appropriate for shin splints, but not for certain muscle pulls. Perhaps you can still run slowly or for some injuries you can run fast, but for only short distances. Make sure you ask how long you should limit your activity and when and how to return to sports. This will be a best guess for any doctor, but if they have experience with the injury, they will at least be able to give you a ballpark idea.



Tips When Going to the Doctor

Bring someone with you.

It can be hard to remember everything during your appointment and having someone with you to listen, take notes or ask additional questions can be not only comforting, but useful. But remember, this is your injury and you are the one who has to follow the doctor's recommendations. So while it is helpful to have a parent with you, by the time you are in high school, the majority of the conversation should be between you and the doctor.

Tell the doctor if you don't understand.

Have them repeat information, slow down, use different words and define their terms. Unless you have taken an anatomy and physiology course, there may be a lot of what is said that may be confusing. If you don't understand what they are saying, you will not get much out of the appointment. Let them know if you are confused.

Ask for a treatment plan or a referral if needed.

You should leave the office understanding exactly what to expect in the coming weeks. You should feel confident in your ability to follow the treatment plan outlined, understand what you should (or should not) do, if you will receive follow-up treatment or other referrals, what sort of progress you should make, what to do if that doesn't occur, and when you can return to regular activities. All these are opportunities to understand your illness or injury.

Take responsibility for your health

It's important to remember that you are your own best caretaker. You can make a real difference in your health by accepting responsibility for your outcome. Read, research, ask questions and become an informed patient. Too many times, the reason an athlete doesn't make adequate progress is because they aren't doing what is recommended.

Visualization for Healing Individuals have reported that visualization works for promoting healing and recovery. Examples of healing imagery include imaging a broken bone being glued back together or torn muscles woven back together. Look at a picture of your injured area and create a movie in your head of it healing has been shown to speed up the recovery processes in some studies.

If time off is the *only* recommendation, it is time to find a new doctor. Remember, any coach can tell you to take time off and he has no medical training. You would hope an expert with multiple years of education and experience would have a better solution for your injuries. Not all doctors know how to treat running injuries or are comfortable working with athletes. Ask other athletes who they would recommend.

One last tip... Stay in contact with your coaches and your team as much as possible. Your physical therapy, cross training or days off should be considered your "practice" but you have to keep your coach in the loop about what your limitations are, how you are coming along and find a way to contribute to the team in whatever way you can.

