Protect
Stop and protect the injured area, by avoiding painful movements, to limit further damage or injury. Taping or strapping may help, but seek medical advice if necessary.

Rest
Resting an injury for at least 72 hours is important immediately after injury and is vital to protect injured tissue from further injury. Progressive loading should then be started after the acute phase.

Ice
Use an ice bag or cold pack, wrapped in a thin, damp towel to apply cold to the injured area. Ice can burn so never apply directly to the skin. Frozen peas can be used, but place them in a marked plastic bag so they are not then eaten and throw away when no longer needed.

Compression
Compress the injured area with a stretchy bandage or Tubigrip. Keep this on for 72 hours, except when icing the area. This should be snug but not tight to allow blood flow. Remove if you feel any tingling or unusual sensations and seek medical advice if unsure.

Elevation
Elevating an injury may reduce the swelling. It is effective when the injured area is raised above the level of the heart. Do not apply compression at the same time.

If your pain or swelling is severe or does not decrease after 48 hours, make an appointment with your GP or a qualified physiotherapist.

Seeking further help
Your GP or a physiotherapist will be able to help if you have on-going problems. A physiotherapist will undertake a full assessment and help you understand your problem. They will then work with you to develop an effective treatment plan and explain how you can avoid further problems.

Physiotherapists work in hospitals, GP surgeries, sports clubs and private clinics, amongst other areas. Physiotherapy is available on the NHS and may either be accessed directly, or require a referral from your GP, depending on the area you live in.

A list of private practitioners in your area is available at www.physio2u.org.uk or you can visit www.acpsm.org (Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Sports Medicine) for physiotherapists who specialise in sports medicine.

Physiotherapists should be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in order to practice – you can check this at www.hcpc-uk.org

Discover more
If you are interested in Physiotherapy as a career, then there is further information available at www.csp.org.uk about becoming a physiotherapist. Plymouth University provides a number of health profession programmes, including physiotherapy. More information is available at www.plymouth.ac.uk/schools/hp or you can scan the QR code below with a smartphone app.

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Each stretch should be held for 20-30 seconds to the point of tightness or slight discomfort.

Over-training

Rest and recovery are important aspects of your training. It is during the rest period that your body becomes stronger as it adapts to the stresses applied during exercise. If sufficient rest is not included, then regeneration cannot occur and performance plateaux.

Warning signs to look out for:
- Constant fatigue
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Depression/ general apathy
- Reduced appetite
- Muscle fatigue
- Diminished performance

COMMON PROBLEMS

Runner’s knee

Also known as ‘patellofemoral pain syndrome’ or ‘ilio-tibial band (ITB) syndrome’. Pain is usually felt around or under the kneecap (patella). This may be due to uneven movement of the patella, caused by overuse, weak muscles (usually the inner quadriceps called Vastus Medialis Oblique) and/or tight structures such as the ITB. A physiotherapist will be able to identify specific problems and treatments may include stretching and strengthening exercises, plus sometimes taping of the patella.

Anterior shin pain

Also called ‘shin splints’ or ‘medial tibial stress syndrome’. Pain is often felt down the front or inside border of your shin (tibia) and is usually worse if running on hard ground. The cause may vary and may include overuse/overloading (especially sudden increases), poor running technique (often with imbalance of the strength/tightness of lower leg muscles) and/or incorrect footwear, particularly for people with an overpronating foot (flattening of the inside arch). The PRICE protocol (below) may help, but a detailed assessment by a physiotherapist or podiatrist may identify the cause. Treatments may include advice on footwear, arch supports, exercises and taping or a compression/support sleeve.

Planter fasciitis

The plantar fascia is the connective tissue across the sole of the foot, between the heel and balls of feet. This can become painful, although contrary to popular belief is not usually inflamed. Causes include overuse and poor footwear. Again, PRICE may help, followed by physiotherapy or podiatry input, if it does not subside. Treatments may include advice on appropriate footwear, the use of arch supports, stretches and in more extreme cases, a steroid injection.

What should I do if I have a problem?

The level of pain usually indicates the seriousness of an injury. If you experience severe pain, extensive bruising or immediate swelling, experience severe pain, whilst appropriate footwear is important, some people find ‘double-socking’ helps, although you need to consider whether your trainers will then be too tight.

It is important to treat blisters early – and appropriately – as they can significantly affect your training and performance. They can potentially cause biomechanical changes, such as to your running technique and how you use your muscles.

Muscle strains and cramps

Commonly affecting the hamstrings (back of the thigh) and the calf and can be caused by overuse and fatigue, sudden changes to training (i.e. distance, frequency etc.), poor running technique and footwear.

Appropriate hydration and electrolyte balance (‘salts’ such as sodium and potassium) can also help particularly with cramp.

Application of PRICE and appropriate stretches can usually help, although recurrent problems would benefit from assessment by a physiotherapist, or doctor to eliminate other medical causes.

Blisters

Blisters are very common with distance runners.Whilst appropriate footwear is important, some people find ‘double-socking’ helps, although you need to consider whether your trainers will then be too tight.

What should I do if I have a problem?

The level of pain usually indicates the seriousness of an injury. If you experience severe pain, extensive bruising or immediate swelling, seek medical attention. However, for mild sprains and strains, you can self treat applying the PRICE principles as soon as you can – this may prevent complications and help you recover quickly.