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Stress Fracture

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What is a stress fracture?

A stress fracture is a break in a bone caused by intense exercise or repetitive and prolonged pressure on the bone. The excessive pressure or intense exercise on the bone exceeds the bone's ability to heal itself, resulting in a breakdown of the bone.

What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of a stress fracture include pain, point tenderness, weakness, difficulty bearing weight or loading the injured extremity, and increased pain with impact activities.

What are the causes?

Stress fractures are caused by repetitive forces greater than the bone can withstand. This usually follows an increase in training schedule such as quick progression of a running program. Due to the repetitive stress of the foot striking the ground, athletes participating in tennis, cross country, track, gymnastics and basketball are very susceptible to stress fractures.

Women are more likely to get a stress fracture when there is a loss or irregular period of menstrual periods. Risks for a stress fracture are increased with previous stress fractures, poor physical conditioning, training on hard surfaces and hard orthotics.

What is the treatment?

Treatment is focused on finding and maintaining a pain free level of activity. If patients are continuing to participate in activities that cause pain either during the activity, after the activity, or the next day, the stress fracture will take longer to heal and there is a greater risk of complication. Temporary immobility, use of crutches, or a walking boot may be indicated based on the location of the stress fracture. Healing of a stress fracture may take 6-8 weeks if patients are pain free with their activities.

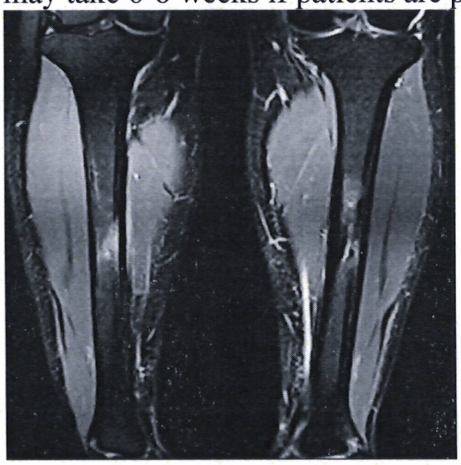

Figure 1: MRI Image showing a stress fracture.

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