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Leg injuries occur following overwork

Pros, novices succumb

By Mike Egan
Of the Emerald

In this decade, physical fitness is a large industry and an important priority in the lives of many people. But along with the benefits of this boom come the reality of sports injuries.

Sports injuries that used to concern only competitive athletes are now commonplace among fitness enthusiasts involved in everything from aerobics to bicycling.

The most common fitness injuries occur in the legs, because workouts in aerobics, bicycling and running center around leg work, and people tend to overtrain.

In Eugene, jogging is one of the most visible sports and a cause of many fitness injuries.

Dr. Steven Roy, director of the Sports Injuries and Running Clinic in Eugene, says he has seen three phases of running injuries. First, beginners who usually see problems after six weeks of training. Then people who run too many miles and develop injuries from overwork, and last, problems which arise for no apparent reason, like tendonitis.

He said the most common injuries come from pronation, which is a rolling of the foot to the inside. This problem can cause injuries in the ankle, shin and knee, including shin splints and stress fractures. Painful shin splints occur when the muscle tears away from the shin bone.

These injuries can also be caused by worn, faulty shoes, or by a person's running style.

"The shoes are getting better and better, but some people with a particular style aren't

suited for them and they have to do other things," Roy said.

Another common problem for runners is muscle imbalance. This condition occurs when one of two opposing muscles, like the quadriceps and the hamstring, become too strong for the opposing muscle and puts excessive stress on that muscle, which leads to pulls and tears.

Roy believes three things would prevent running injuries: developing a good training program, wearing good shoes, and stretching.

"The two most important things are, one, having adequate time to adapt to work out a training program so you don't increase too quickly. And second, getting a shoe to fit so that you don't have phonation," he said.

He stresses that stretching should be gentle and static, no bobbing on the muscle.

In aerobics, like running, the legs take a pounding and incur most of the injuries. Shoes, technique and workout pace all play roles in preventing injuries.

"People in good shape in aerobics see more injury in the lower extremities (legs). They see more foot and ankle injuries, while people starting out have more back problems because of posture," said Kent Keyser, a physical therapist at the Sports Injuries and Running Clinic of Eugene.

Sharon Simpson-Stapleton, aerobic director at Oregon West Fitness, said shin splints are prevalent in aerobics because many of the exercises require a heel-to-toe movement that puts pressure on the shin muscles.

"The most common injuries, like shin splints, are from overuse. A person will get their cardiovascular system in shape before their muscles and start to feel good, but work their body too hard and have problems," said Simpson-Stapleton.

In most fitness activities the floor does not play a role in injuries, but in aerobics it can cause problems. If there is a lot of jumping on a hardwood

floor, injuries to the knees and lower back can develop from the stress of striking the floor.

Simpson-Stapleton said Oregon West uses a cushioned floor that, "enables us to minimize the shock that might be taken in the knees or lower back."

Also, she said some people have problems with twisted ankles because they do not wear shoes with enough ankle support or shoes which catch on the carpet.

Roy said he used to handle a lot of stress fractures, shin splints and tendonitis in aerobics teachers, "when it started booming, but not now because people are taking better care of themselves."

Simpson-Stapleton estimated, "60 percent of the injuries are instructor's, and the other 40 percent are participant's because of overuse." She has had therapy for tendon problems in her heel, which forced her to miss two weeks of teaching.

To prevent injuries at Oregon West, Simpson-Stapleton h's a list of exercises that her instructors will not do, and each class exercise is examined to determine if it is harmful. Ultimately, she feels the best prevention is to curb overuse.

"If people take three or four classes a week, they have no problem, but after five, that is where you see problems. A lot of it has to do with recovery time," she said.

The last of the leg offenders is bicycling.

The most traumatic injuries in cycling are from crashes and spills, but the bulk of problems occur, again, from overtraining. Overuse can cause knee joint and knee cap injuries and pain.

"Overuse injuries mainly occur in the summer, when people go on a cycling trip. They decide to do 200 miles in the mountains, up the coast from San Francisco or down from Seattle and have knee problems," Simpson-Stapleton has a

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