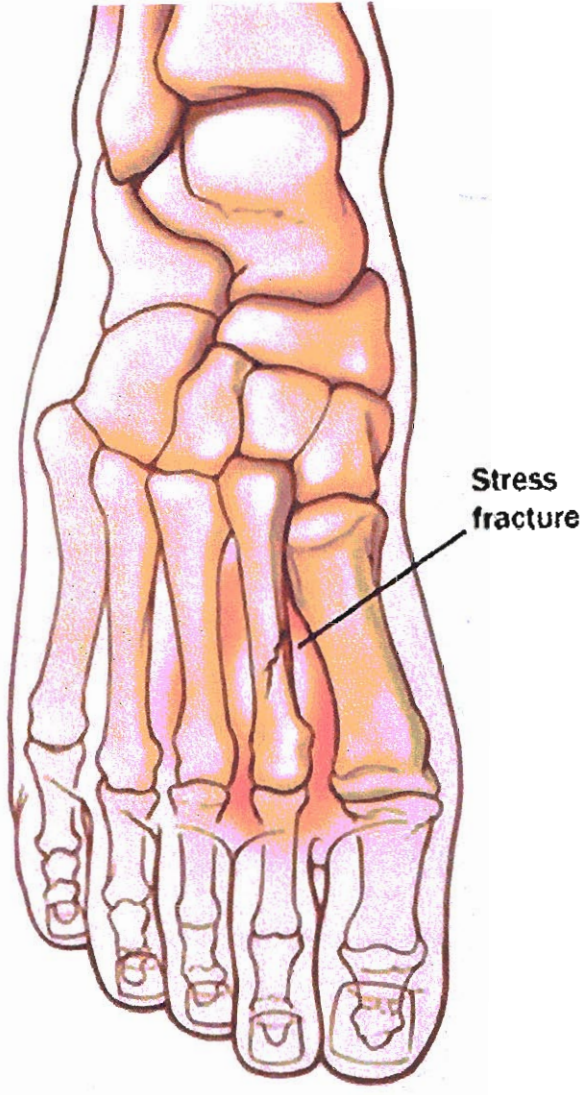


Stress fractures

Stress fractures — Comprehensive overview covers symptoms, treatment and prevention of this common overuse injury.

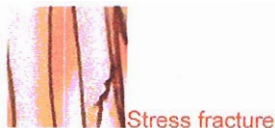
Definition

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Stress fractures are tiny cracks in a bone — most commonly, in the weight-bearing bones of the lower leg and foot.



Stress fractures are tiny cracks in a bone. Stress fractures are caused by the repetitive application of force, often by overuse — such as repeatedly jumping up and down or running long distances. Stress fractures can also arise from normal use of a bone that's been weakened by a condition such as osteoporosis.

Stress fractures are most common in the weight-bearing bones of the lower leg and foot. Track and field athletes are particularly susceptible to stress fractures, but anyone can experience a stress fracture. If you're starting a new exercise program, for example, you may be at risk if you do too much too soon.

Symptoms

Symptoms of a stress fracture include:

- Swelling
- Pain
- Tenderness in a specific spot
- Increased swelling and pain with activity
- Decreased swelling and pain with rest
- Earlier onset of pain with each successive workout
- Continued pain at rest as the damage progresses

At first, stress fractures may be barely noticeable. But pay attention to the pain. Proper self-care and treatment can keep the stress fracture from worsening.

When to see a doctor

Contact your doctor if your pain becomes severe or persists even at rest.

Causes

Stress fractures are caused by the repetitive application of a greater amount of force than the bones of your feet and lower legs normally bear. This force causes an imbalance between the resorption and growth of bone, both of which go on all the time. Repetitive force promotes the turnover of bone cells, but you add new bone cells when you're at rest.

If your bones are subjected to unaccustomed force without enough time for recovery, you'll resorb bone cells faster than you can replace them. As a result, you develop "bone fatigue." Continued, repetitive force causes tiny cracks in fatigued bones. These cracks progress to become stress fractures.

