



## STRESS FRACTURE

### What is it?

This is a fracture that occurs commonly in the metatarsal, but can occur in any bone that bears weight. It is not due to a traumatic incident, like a fall, but more to repetitive stress. Usually it starts with activity that is out of the normal range for the person. It often is preceded by a dull ache. Swelling and a bruise can accompany a stress fracture.

### How is it diagnosed?

Fifty percent of initial radiographs (x-rays) are negative. So a normal x-ray does not exclude a stress fracture. Often a bone scan (special kind of x-ray) is required to prove the diagnosis. They can show up on MRI scan.

### What is the treatment?

Most stress fractures will heal uneventfully if the patient limits his or her weight bearing. This rarely requires crutches or a walker, but rather a concerted effort to sit when able and to avoid walking and standing activities. This includes obvious things like walking/running for exercise, but also includes things like going to a hockey game or Home Depot where there is extended walking on cement.

### Does having a stress fracture mean I have weak bone?

Not necessarily. If you take normal, strong bone and repeatedly stress it beyond what it is used to, it can develop a stress fracture. A classic example is military recruits who go to boot camp. After living normal life, they are required to run and march extended distances. Most people can avoid stress fractures by slowly increasing their activity and doing it on alternate days.

### Can I exercise while my stress fracture is healing?

Yes, but not weight bearing exercise on your feet. You can bike or swim, do sit ups, leg lifts, lift weights as long as not doing leg press activities.

### How can I avoid having a stress fracture in the future?

Avoid activity on your feet that is out of what is normal for you. During the holiday season I will see one that occurs after extended shopping on concrete floors. If you are a runner, start low (1 mile), and increase by 10% per week. That is a very slow increase. Also do your running/walking on alternate days with non-weight bearing exercise on the other days (like biking or swimming).