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What are shin splints and how do I get rid of them?

Shin splints are characterized by pain that is felt on the inside lower half of the shin bone (tibia) when walking or exercising.

So why does the bone hurt?

Bones provide not only support for the body but also act as anchors for the muscles to pull upon to create movement. The bony attachments of those pulling muscles can become irritated or inflamed with overuse- in the case of the leg or shin bone that irritation produces the pain we call shin splints.

The muscle in the leg most commonly causing this pain is the posterior tibialis. This muscle, among other actions, helps control the rolling-in motion of the ankle (pronation). Overuse of this muscle can occur with too much exercise too soon, poor biomechanics of the foot and ankle, and/or worn out or improper footwear.

Getting rid of shin splints requires not only rest for the muscles and bone and anti-inflammatory (NSAID's and ice) but also elimination of the causes of the injury. Strengthening the posterior tibialis muscle, improving footwear to provide more pronation support, and/or modifying activity levels/training regimens.

Note that there can be other causes for pain in the leg such as stress fractures of the tibia and these can be ruled out by your doctor.