

SAINT FRANCIS SPORTS MEDICINE

Making athletes of all ages BETTER, STRONGER, FASTER since 1995.

- ⊕ Fitness Questions to Ask Your Doctor
- ⊕ Painful Bunions Can Sap the Spring Out of Your Stride



Feeling Differently Could Be a Signal That Something's Changed

If you follow a regular exercise routine, chances are you know exactly how your body should feel on a day-to-day basis. You may want to pay a visit to your primary healthcare provider if things start feeling a little off. It may be a signal that something is amiss.

“Every athlete goes through ups and downs, with some days feeling better than others,” says Matt Holder, ATC, certified athletic trainer at Saint Francis Medical Center. “However, if you begin feeling symptoms that are more significant in nature and they occur more frequently, then you definitely should consult your physician.”

Here are a few common concerns that might trigger thoughts about your own health:

You Feel Dizzy or Lightheaded During Cardio Workouts

Any of several reasons could be behind this issue, but the most likely is an iron deficiency known as anemia. If your body is short on iron, which is more common for people who adhere to a vegetarian or vegan diet, you may need to make some adjustments. There are a variety of foods rich in iron that fall within the vegetarian and vegan diets.

Women who get their period regularly also may experience anemia. A more subtle sign of a potential anemia issue is simply feeling fatigued during a workout that you usually can complete relatively easily.

You Are Out of Breath Too Easily

Being out of breath after pounding an interval workout is one thing. But huffing and puffing after climbing a flight of stairs may be a sign you have other issues going on. Anemia also could be at play here, but your physician likely will want to conduct some tests to rule out conditions such as asthma, pulmonary problems or even cardiac issues.

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Are Your Medications Creating Problems?

Virtually every medication has some type of side effect. If you've recently begun taking a new medication – even the over-the-counter variety – and notice changes with how your body performs or responds to exercise, looking into potential side effects may be a logical place to start.

Some side effects have emotional effects rather than physical effects. Consult your physician if you find yourself depressed or generally down in the dumps more than before starting the new medication.

You Feel Weak or Get the Shakes

Assuming you have enough experience to know how much caloric fuel you need to have onboard prior to exercise, feeling extremely hungry during or immediately after a workout could be a sign of low blood sugar. You could be hypoglycemic or in the early stages of diabetes. Let your doctor know right away if you are experiencing this type of weakness.

Your Legs Cramp Up at Night

Lactic acid buildup, especially in your calves, can result in painful cramps in the middle of the night. This condition is more common for those who exercise late in the day and don't warm down sufficiently. Try doing a little stretching or walk up and down the stairs a few times before going to bed.

Your cramps also might be a sign of a nutritional issue such as a shortage of potassium or magnesium, which the body burns through during exercise.

For more information about how your fitness program affects your health, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Healthcare System at 573-331-5153.

Genetics and Shoe Choice Play Roles in Tendency for Bunions

You may not be able to ignore that large bump at the base of your big toe much longer. It's been slowly developing over the past several months, and lately it's really starting to hurt. In fact, your big toe isn't even lined up properly with the rest of your toes anymore.

Unlike traumatic injuries such as sprained ankles, bunions can take a significant amount of time to develop into a debilitating condition. But now that your bunion is quite evidently here, it won't be going away without some medical intervention.

"Many athletes who suffer from bunions have dealt with the issue over a long period of time as they gradually worsen," says Matt Holder, ATC, certified athletic trainer at Saint Francis Medical Center. "It's time to seek medical treatment when the pain becomes severe enough that it affects your ability to move properly. Favoring an injury or condition will only lead to the development of other injuries."

Bunions form when the bone or tissue at the bottom of the big toe gradually moves out of place. The big toe eventually will bend inward toward the other toes, causing a painful lump on the toe joint. Since that joint carries much of the body's weight, bunions can cause athletes to alter their foot strike and create additional injury.

Women are more likely than men to develop bunions, especially as they age. Years of abnormal pressure on the joint, such as from regularly wearing high-heeled shoes, along with a family history of bunions can be contributing factors.

Try These Nonsurgical Treatment Options

While surgery is the only treatment capable of returning the big toe to its correct position, there are several noninvasive options that active individuals can try short of surgery.

Wide shoes – Choose a shoe model that features enough space in the forefoot so that your toes don't squeeze together. This includes dress shoes and casual shoes, in addition to your competition shoes.

Shoe inserts – Specifically designed inserts can help position the foot correctly inside the shoe. If an over-the-counter model doesn't provide relief, you may need a prescription orthotic.

Toe pads – A gel-filled or moleskin pad available at most drugstores may relieve some pressure.

Temperature and water – Some bunion sufferers find relief using ice packs, warm soaks and massage treatments.

Pain relievers – Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen can provide temporary relief from minor pain.

For more information about treatment options for bunions, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Healthcare System at 573-331-5153.