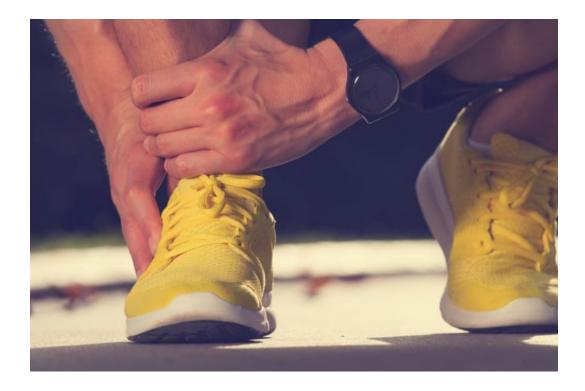**Overuse Syndrome**

Next to acute injuries, the overuse syndrome is one of the most frequent injuries of the foot and ankle - and one of the most preventable. Overuse syndrome is a combination of symptoms which if not attended to early on can result in chronic conditions of heel pain, shin splints and stress fractures.

Overuse syndromes occur in 3 stages. Stage 1 is seldom associated with pain and often begins as a "bother". Patients tell me that their foot has been "bothering" them for the past 4 months. Characteristically it occurs during an activity (walking, running, exercise), lingers for a short time and is gone the next day. But it comes back again when they resume the activity and always in the same localized area. Now it has become so painful the patient can't even walk. If the pain they are experiencing is not due to a traumatic injury it can often be traced back to a preventable overuse syndrome.

Recognizing an overuse syndrome in the initial "bothersome" stage can prevent progression to Stage 2 and 3 when professional care is necessary to avoid a

chronic condition or permanent damage. Here are some suggestions for recognizing an overuse syndrome

1. Listen to your body and watch for any bother in the same part that appears during an activity, gradually goes away and quickly returns on the next activity session
2. Keep a journal with a diagram of the foot, ankle and lower leg; if you notice a repetitive ache or bother in a particular area, note the place with an X on your diagram with the date, time and activity you were doing. If you begin to get a cluster of marks in the same place there is a good chance that you are beginning to develop an overuse syndrome.

If you suspect that an overuse syndrome is beginning, cut back on your activity for a few days. Resume your activity again and see if the problem occurs. If it does, seek professional help early to avoid getting into Stage 2 and 3. Your podiatric physician can evaluate your problem and assess your structure or foot type which may be contributing to your problem.