Summer Brings Workout Routines to the Beach

Running along the beach in the soft sand may seem like a good way to cushion your legs, ankles, and feet. In fact, if you take your workout to the beach, you actually may put more strain on your muscles and joints.

"As the summer months begin, running outside, particularly while on vacation at the shore or on the beach, remains one of the most popular activities. But running on the beach comes with risks," says Michael Ciccotti, MD, chief of Sports Medicine at the Rothman Institute at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, PA.

Because the sand is loose, running puts an unnatural strain on your calves and Achilles tendon. And if your foot naturally rolls to the inside (pronates) or outside (supinates), sand provides absolutely no support for it, so any problems with your foot strike are automatically magnified.

The most common injuries from running in sand, says Dr. Ciccotti, include:

--Tendinitis of the knee, which usually results in an inflammation of the tendon either directly above or
    directly below the knee cap.
--Sprains of any one of the four ligaments in the knee, which stabilize the knee joint.
--Injury to either one of the C-shaped cartilage that cushion the knee joint.
--Irritation of the fibrous connective tissue at the sole of the foot, called plantar fasciitis.
--Sprains of the ankle ligaments on either side of the ankle.
--Stress fractures of the foot or ankle.
--Incomplete hairline breaks in the bones of the lower leg, foot, or thigh, which most often occur with
    progressive soreness, swelling, or stiffness.

To avoid these injuries:

1) Wear running shoes when you run on the beach. The ideal running shoes provide shock absorption, motion control, and stability.

2) Don't do "too much, too fast, too soon." Yes, you want to increase your sports activities in beautiful surroundings. But if you're a casual runner who normally puts in very few miles a week be careful not to dramatically increase your mileage.

3) Be aware of your particular anatomic makeup. Some runners may have high foot arches, one leg shorter than the other, scoliosis (curvature of the spine), or excessive muscle tightness. Running on something other than a smooth surface may increase your susceptibility to a running injury.

4) Warm-up for 10 minutes, for example, take a brisk walk on the beach, then stretch your leg muscles for 5-10 minutes before completing your run. Stretch again afterwards.

5) Be aware of the temperature and terrain. Keep well-hydrated when the temperatures are high and avoid running during the hottest part of the day. Also, lookout for extreme drop offs, holes, fast approaching inclines, and alternating hard and soft spots in the sand.