

Compression Socks and Sleeves

You have probably seen people at races or running around the streets that have those compression socks or sleeves on. Maybe you have thought to yourself, “Do those really work?” or “I wonder if those would help my shin splints or calf cramps?”

Let’s talk about what compression socks and sleeves do to help the body. Compression socks and sleeves provide graduated compression, meaning the compression is higher (tighter) at the foot and ankle and lower (looser) as it moves up the calf and lower leg. This type of compression helps to fight the effects of gravity and assist the body in venous return (deoxygenated blood flowing back up to the heart).

So are compression socks or sleeves good for shin splints, calf cramps/strains, and Achilles tendonitis?



The answer is yes; however, they will not cure any condition if the only thing you are doing to help your injury is wearing compression. All injuries should be assessed by a medical professional so that the real cause can be addressed. Wearing compression can help to make your injury feel better as you are recovering, help get you through that last long run before your marathon, or possibly prevent a new injury from coming on. Proper rest, massage, stretching, strength training, and footwear should all be considered when dealing with a lower leg injury.

What if you’re not injured, can you still benefit from compression?

Absolutely! Increased blood flow is going to help improve your performance and decrease the rate of fatigue of your muscles. Compression will also help to stabilize the calf muscle and decrease the amount of muscular vibration, resulting in decreased fatigue. It will also help you to recover quicker, meaning that you will be ready for your next workout, so you can train harder.

Should I wear socks or sleeves?

The answer to this question depends on a few things. If your injury involves your arch, ankle, or lower Achilles tendon, you are going to want to wear a sock to cover the injured area. If your injury is up higher, a sleeve should be fine. Another factor to take into consideration is what type of sock you like to wear. If you have a favorite pair of running socks that you can’t run without, you will probably like the sleeve better since you can wear your favorite socks with it.

What about for recovery?

If you are going to be using the compression product for recovery, you should wear the sock. You don’t want to have a huge swollen foot and ankle because the blood couldn’t flow past the tightness of the lowest part of a compression sleeve. Wear the sock and the graduated compression will work in your favor by keeping the foot and ankle in good shape.