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Ballerina injury for fast bowlers

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An injury common among ballerinas is now the scourge of Australia's strike bowlers.

Leading ankle surgeon Martin Sullivan has operated on six Australian members of the Test or one-day side, five of them bowlers.

All had the same injury: a small bone called the Os Trigonum had been compressed in the back of their ankle so that it was pushed upwards against the tibia causing pain.

"For the bowlers it's as if the bone were a nut being crushed in a nut cracker," Sullivan told a sports medicine conference in Canberra this week.

He told The Australian the 10-month itinerary - from October through to July - that Cricket Australia had set was probably contributing to the condition he called "posterior ankle impingement".

He warned CA's medical staff to be aware of it, just as most ballet companies were.

The extreme pressure caused by all of a ballerina's weight being on their toes was the same as that created by a fast bowler planting his leading foot on the crease.

The injury can be managed with physiotherapy and painkilling injections throughout a season but in chronic cases surgery is the only option.

Combined with proper rest, an athlete will be right to compete again in the next season. But the problem for cricketers is there is not enough rest between seasons.

"If you look at other sport where this problem occurs, especially the athletes I've operated on, it is a problem you can deal with, with proper rest," Sullivan said.

"But what's happening with cricketers is that their itinerary is such that there is no time.

"Australian cricketers are like you or I; we all need a certain amount of time to heal things."

Sullivan said the injury was a direct result of overwork.

"There is no doubt that this is the result of their heavy work schedule," he said. "These are not trauma injuries.

"Cricketers, as they put their front foot down, everything at the back of the ankle gets crunched.

"In the past it was rare for cricketers and now we've got over half the current team and there's probably a reason for it."

Sullivan also believed cricketers felt they had to keep playing to keep their place in the Australian team so they hid the injury from CA medical staff.

The six on which Sullivan has performed ankle surgery are Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee, Stuart MacGill, Steve Waugh, Nathan Bracken and Ricky Ponting.

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