

Heel Pain from Plantar Fasciitis

What is the Plantar Fascia?

The plantar fascia is a flat ligament type tissue made up of three bands that travel from the heel bone under the arch to just in front of the ball of the foot. Like other ligaments, it does not stretch but is designed to maintain the curvature of the arch of our feet and provide stability to our foot as we step off.

While it is incredibly strong, because of the stress is placed upon it we regularly see people complaining of pain in the heel because of injury to the plantar fascia. The most common reason is where small tears have developed in the plantar fascia, which have become inflamed: this condition is now called plantar fasciitis, (the 'itis' at the in meaning inflammation).

While it is normally a overuse condition and may develop gradually, multiple small injuries to the plantar fascia, (for which the person is unaware of), can be exacerbated and further injured by a single episode of high-pressure, (e.g. walking around town all day in the wrong shoes or standing on a ladder or jumping out of a truck.)

Factors that will increase your risk of having plantar fasciitis

- a. Tight calf muscles
- b. Moderate to marked lower leg and foot biomechanical misalignments
- c. Poor functioning joints in the midfoot and especially the big toe joint, usually a condition called functional hallux limitus or Fhl
- d. Lifestyle stresses: e.g. new sport that is placing higher stress on the foot
- e. Poor Footwear choices

The symptoms you can feel

The most common presenting symptom with plantar fasciitis is in severe pain first thing out of bed in the morning or taking the first few steps after sitting for long period of time. This can be due to many reasons, but most commonly it is due to the link between plantar fasciitis and tight calf muscles. Most people as they sleep in bed position themselves in a fetal position, (curled up on their side, with feet pointing down). This allows the calf muscles to contract up tight so when you get out of bed and stand as a calf muscle is not able to stretch immediately, the foot has to compensate usually by rolling in, resulting in huge stress being placed on the plantar fascia. After some time of walking around or after a hot shower, the calf muscle stretches out relieving the pressure on under the plantar fascia so the symptoms improve.

Is this you? Try this simple exercise to see if it helps:

- before getting out of bed, while still under the warm bedclothes, gently stretch the calf muscle by bringing your toes towards your leg, but gently now!
- Repeat this 20 times, slightly increasing the stretch on the 6th, 11th and 16th time
- this will stretch out the calf muscle and increase the blood supply to the area as well as help lubricate the joints of the foot

I hope this helps!

Less common symptoms can be burning, tearing, aching they can become very sharp and a bruising feeling under the heel.

Treating this condition

The most difficult part of a successful treatment of plantar fasciitis is the correct diagnosis of what is causing the pain. The reason why there is so many treatments available for heel pain is that it does vary from person to person and it can be caused by a number of reasons and so there was no one treatment that solves every plantarfasciitis condition: no matter what the ads say! My first advice would be to save you money and consult a health professional who regularly sees and treats heel pain. Once a thorough examination has done you may be offered the following treatment options:

- rest: no sport, lessening activities requiring walking up and down stairs, no standing on ladders, wearing shoes with a small heel, lessening your day-to-day activities

- direct resting of the injury: rigid sports taping (this can also be used to see if the pain is mechanical in nature), CAM Walker boots, plaster casts

- ice massage: either through direct massaging with ice or rolling your foot over a bottle filled with frozen water for 10 minutes twice daily. To do this fill a plastic soft drink bottle, (ones with waists are the best) with water to three-quarter full and then freeze overnight

- stretching:

- Stretching the plantar fascia and calf muscles to improve their flexibility is a great way to

reduce the pressure off the plantar fascia,

- Improving the function of the foot: correctly prescribed orthotics can significantly improve the pain you feel, how your foot works and reduce the risk of that occurring again

- anti-inflammatory tablets and cortisone injections: anti-inflammatory tablets are a powerful means to reduce the pain you feel because of the injury and inflammation. While many people are scared to take tablets, often over a very short period of time it is a good idea as it will stop you walking away from the pain which can sometimes lead to inflammation of other parts of the leg and feet, so long as you are actively addressing the issue that caused the plantar fasciitis in the first place. A cortisone injection is one of the most powerful anti-inflammatory measures we have wear a single injection can give up to three months pain relief. It has to be noted however, that this is not addressing the issues rather giving you relief from the pain, so the other areas still need to be addressed

- other options include: acupuncture, night splints, surgery, Extracorporeal shock wave therapy, or ESWT, huge number of ' guaranteed successful' treatments of the Internet