

Heel pain / plantar fasciitis

Information and advice

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This information is designed to supplement the advice given by your doctor, and is written by physiotherapists based on the latest medical advice.

What is plantar fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis means inflammation of the tough fibrous band of tissue (fascia) connecting your heel bone to the base of your toes.



What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis?

This condition starts with pain located at the tip of the heel, usually on the inner aspect. The pain is normally worse after rest, when you first stand and take a few steps, then settles as you continue to walk. Most often this is worst first thing in the morning.

What causes plantar fasciitis?

Anything which places increased stress along the tough fibrous band of plantar fascia will cause it to become irritated and inflamed. There are a number of causes, such as:

- If you are overweight, or have gained weight suddenly
- If you run, walk or stand for long periods, especially on hard surfaces
- If you have very flat feet or very high arches
- If you wear poor footwear such as worn out shoes or flip flops
- If you have tight calf muscles

What can you do to help plantar fasciitis?

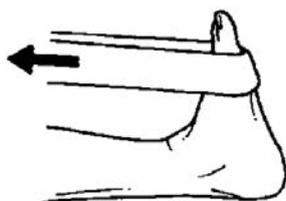
A number of things can be done to help:

- **Relative rest** – reduce or avoid running, excessive walking and standing for long periods especially on hard surfaces e.g. concrete.
- **Ice application** – apply ice to the area to reduce the inflammation. This can be done by taking a chilled bottle/can from the freezer and slowly rolling your foot over it, concentrating on the painful heel area, for 10 minutes, two to four times a day. Wear a thin sock to protect the skin. Do not do this if your skin sensation is impaired.
- **Footwear** – try to wear shoes which are cushioned, lace-up/fastening and have a good inner arch support such as trainers. Heel cushions/cups can be bought from your local pharmacist and placed in the heel of your shoes. Some people find wearing shoes with a slight heel beneficial. Avoid wearing worn out shoes, flip-flops and slip-on shoes.
- **Medications** – these can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice.
- **Weight control** – reduce your weight if you are overweight.
- **Calf stretching exercises** – the stretching programme below can be performed to increase the flexibility of the ankle, and reduce the stress on the foot.

Before getting up out of bed or from a chair, stretch the foot upwards, using a towel to help.

Hold for 20 seconds

Repeat five times



Place the affected foot behind.

Keeping the back leg straight, bend the front knee gently lunging forwards – feel the stretch in the back of the calf.

Hold for 20 seconds, five times

Repeat three to four times a day



Place the affected foot behind and gently bend your knees – feel the stretch in the back of the calf.

Hold for 20 seconds, five times

Repeat three to four times a day

Place the toes of your affected foot against the wall and lean forward until you feel a stretch underneath your foot.

Hold for 20 seconds, five times

Repeat three to four times a day



If you feel the exercises are making your pain worse, reduce the number or frequency of the exercises or stop and seek advice

Plantar fasciitis can take some months to settle down. If your symptoms do not settle within three months of following the above steps, your GP can refer you on to either a podiatrist or physiotherapist. Injection or surgery is rarely performed and is regarded as a 'last resort'.

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