



Plantar Fasciitis – A Common Cause of Heel Pain

What causes heel pain? - One of the most common causes of heel pain is a problem called "plantar fasciitis." Plantar fasciitis is the term doctors use when a part of the foot called the plantar fascia gets irritated or swollen. The plantar fascia is a tough band of tissue that connects the heel bone to the toes. Heel pain caused by plantar fasciitis is very common. It often affects people who run, jump, or stand for long periods. Most people who get this type of heel pain get better within a year even if they do not get treated.

What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis? - The most common symptom is pain under the heel and sole (bottom) of the foot. The pain is often worst when you first get out of bed in the morning. It can also be bad when you get up after being seated for some time.

Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better? - Yes, you can:

- **Rest** - Give your foot a chance to heal by resting. But don't completely stop being active. Doing that can lead to more pain and stiffness in the long run.
- **Ice your foot** - Putting ice on your heel for 20 minutes up to 4 times a day might relieve pain. Icing and massaging your foot before exercise might also help. Rolling a frozen water bottle under your foot is a great way to combine icing and stretching.
- **Take pain medicines** - If your pain is severe, you can try taking pain medicines that you can get without a prescription. Examples include ibuprofen (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (sample brand name: Aleve). But if you have other medical conditions or already take other medicines, ask your doctor or nurse before taking new pain medicines.
- **Wear sturdy shoes** - Sneakers with a lot of cushion and good arch and heel support are best. Shoes with rigid soles can also help. Adding padded or gel heel inserts to your shoes might help, too.
- **Wear splints at night** - Some people feel better if they wear a splint while they sleep that keeps their foot straight. These splints are sold in drugstores and medical supply stores.
- **Do special foot exercises** - Certain exercises can help with heel pain. Do these exercises every day.

Foot Exercise for Plantar Fasciitis

Plantar fascia stretch

To do this stretch, stand straight with your hands against a wall and your injured leg slightly behind your other leg. Keeping your heels flat on the floor, slowly bend both knees. You should feel the stretch in the lower part of your leg. Hold the stretch for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat the stretch 6 to 8 times.

Calf stretch

Stand with your hands against a wall and your injured leg behind your other leg. With your injured leg straight, your heel flat on the floor and your foot pointed straight ahead, lean slowly forward, bending the other leg. You should feel the stretch in the middle of your calf. Hold the stretch for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat the stretch 6 to 8 times.

Other exercises

You can also strengthen your leg muscles by standing on the ball of your foot at the edge of a step and raising up as high as possible on your toes. Relax between toe raises and let your heel fall a little lower than the edge of the step.

It's also helpful to strengthen the foot by grabbing a towel with your toes as if you are going to pick up the towel with your foot. Repeat this exercise several times a day.

Is there a test for plantar fasciitis? - No, there is no test. But your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms and doing an exam. He or she might suggest an X-ray, or other tests to check whether your symptoms might be caused by something else.

How is plantar fasciitis treated? - The first step is to try the things you can do on your own. But if you do not get better, or your symptoms are severe, your doctor or nurse might suggest:

- Taping up your foot in a special way that helps the support the foot
- Special shoe inserts, made to fit your foot
- Shots (that go into your foot) of a medicine called a steroid, which can help with the pain
- Putting a splint over your foot and ankle
- Surgery (this is an option only in some cases that do not get better with other treatments)

Is there anything I can do to keep from getting heel pain again? - Yes. To reduce the chances that your pain will come back:

- Wear shoes that fit well, have a lot of cushion, and support the heel and ankle
- Avoid wearing slippers, flip-flops, slip-ons, or poorly fitted shoes
- Avoid going barefoot
- Do not wear worn-out shoes