



PLANTAR FASCIITIS (HEEL PAIN)

Pain in the heel is one of the most common lower extremity injuries we see. The pain is usually due to irritation of the plantar fascia. The plantar fascia is a thick rubber like structure that pads and supports the bottom of your foot. Its attachment to the heel is particularly vulnerable to stress and strain. Injury to the plantar fascia may be due to chronic overloading such as running, jumping, or simply being overweight and out of shape for too long. It may also occur as an acute injury like falling off a ladder or stepping off the curb wrong.

Some people may be more prone to this injury because of excessive body weight, abnormal foot type, work activities and worn out shoes. In any case, appropriate treatment of plantar fasciitis requires patience and a lot of time. The average healing time for the complete resolution of plantar fasciitis is 6-12 months. The treatment program depends on a number of factors, the most important of which is how well each individual can follow the prescribed treatment program.

The initial phase of treatment is to establish control over pain. The key elements are as follows:

- *Always wear shoes! When you walk barefoot you eliminate all cushioning and the plantar fascia bears all the brunt of your body weight.

- *Get new shoes. Shoes with good cushioning significantly lower the stress and pressure on the plantar fascia and this speeds healing. Walking and/or running shoes provide the most cushioning while high heels and pumps provide none. Most shoes have lost most of their cushioning properties by 6 months and should be replaced after this time.

- *Lose weight. Your body weight is magnified 2-4 times at the foot and ankle when walking. The loss of five pounds can reduce the force on your plantar fascia by up to 20 pounds with every step! This goes a long way in the treatment of your injury.

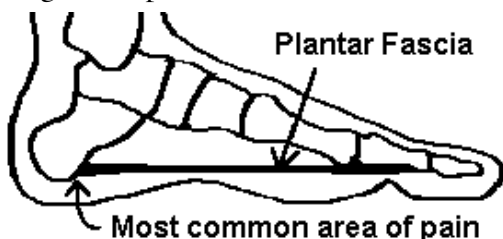
- *Avoid prolonged standing.

- *Be careful when getting up in the morning or after prolonged sitting. The plantar fascia tightens up when the foot is at rest. The plantar fascia is then stretched when you start walking, this can result in tearing of the tightened tissues. Go slow and let it stretch out gradually.

- *Avoid painful activities. Every time you experience pain you are actually re injuring this injured area and this creates the chronic injury cycle.

- *Stretching the Achilles tendon and plantar fascia. This will make these structures more flexible and reduce the chronic tearing. Use caution when stretching because excessive stretching (i.e. painful stretching) can lead to tearing.

Lean forward against a wall, keeping your back and one knee comfortably straight while you bend the other knee. (If both of your heels hurt, then you will need to reverse this position after you have exercised each heel. If only one of your heels hurt, place the painful heel further away from the wall.) As you bend forward, the leg that remains straight is the one you will be exercising. As you lean forward, you can feel your heel cord and the arch of your foot stretch. (Try to keep your back heel on the ground, although as you stretch, it will gradually lift off the ground.) Stretch comfortably and hold for no more than 10 seconds. Then relax and straighten up. Then stretch again. Repeat this no more than 20 times. If your other heel bothers you, then you should stretch this side as well by reversing your position.



Following the above steps results in healing in almost all cases of plantar fasciitis. If your injury persists, other treatments such as cortisone injections and arch supports may be needed. Once again, the main factor in healing is your ability to follow these recommendations on a regular daily basis.