

Plantar fasciitis

Trauma and Orthopaedics

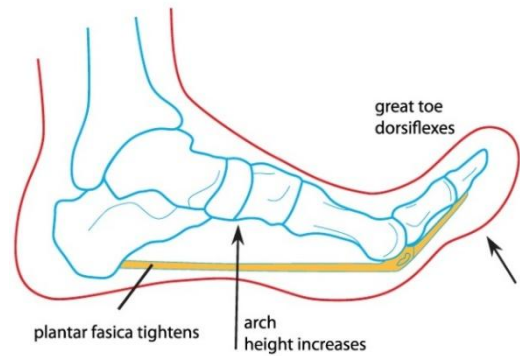
Information for patients and carers

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What is plantar fasciitis?

The plantar fascia is a thick, fibrous band of tissue on the bottom of your foot. It connects your heel bone to your toes.

Plantar fasciitis is a condition that happens when the plantar fascia becomes inflamed or damaged, causing pain under the heel.



Causes and symptoms

Plantar fasciitis is caused by too much pressure, shearing, traction (pulling) or constant overload on the heel. In response, the area swells and little tears form. This leads to degeneration of the plantar fascia.

The heel becomes painful after long periods of standing, walking or sport. It is worse when you first put weight on it after resting (e.g. getting out of bed in the morning).

Other things that can lead to plantar fasciitis include:

- older age
- weight gain and obesity
- reduced ankle and toe movement
- tight calf muscles
- unsuitable footwear, such as non-cushioning soles or worn-out shoes
- change in activity such as running or walking more

Some people with plantar fasciitis have 'heel spurs' on X-rays, these are not generally the cause of the pain.

Symptoms of plantar fasciitis can last for up to 2 years. By this time, over 95% of patients will have recovered without any treatment. Our treatment aims to lower the level of symptoms and speed up recovery.

How is plantar fasciitis treated?

Relative rest – complete rest is not recommended as some stress is required to maintain the health of the foot bones and soft tissues. Exercise is also important for weight loss management, which in turn decreases stress on the foot.

You should avoid running and long periods of standing or walking. To stay active, impact sports can be replaced by swimming or cycling.

Weight training can be used to maintain leg strength. You can return to full activity once your symptoms start to improve.

Medication – over the counter, anti-inflammatory medicines (e.g. ibuprofen) can help to reduce pain and swelling.

Ice - applying ice / cold packs to the sore area for 15 to 20 minutes can help to relieve pain. You should leave at least 2 hours between applications and place a damp cloth between the cold pack and your skin to prevent ice burns.

Physiotherapy - regular gentle stretching of the calf and plantar fascia can help to ease symptoms. 8 out of 10 patients find the pain eases with these stretching exercises. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds and repeat 10 times.



Left calf stretch



Plantar fascia stretch

Footwear - avoid walking barefoot. Use well-cushioned shoes for comfort and shock absorption.

Orthotics and/or heel pads - simple heel pads can help to reduce pressure from the painful part of the heel as they absorb the shock. Custom-fit orthoses that provide arch support can also help.

Are there any other treatment options?

Steroid injections

A steroid (cortisone) injection is sometimes used if pain remains despite other treatments. Steroids work by reducing inflammation or swelling. An injection may relieve pain for weeks or months and may cure symptoms in some cases. Injections are not always successful and there is a very small risk of infection and rupture of the plantar fascia.

Shockwave therapy

In long-term cases that don't settle with other treatments, shockwave therapy can help (if available, specialised equipment is needed for this).

Surgery

Surgery is rarely needed. It is only considered for a small number of patients whose symptoms continue after 12 to 18 months of treatment. Surgery may involve the release of a small tendon behind the knee to lengthen the calf muscle.

Further information

Please let staff know of any concerns or questions you may have. We will do our best to answer your queries quickly.