



Heel Pain: What is Plantar Fasciitis?

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Plantar fasciitis is inflammation of the fascia (connective tissues) primarily in the heel, but sometimes in the arch of the foot as well.

Symptoms:

1. Intense heel pain, especially upon waking and putting weight on the foot in the morning. Also when ending a long day on your feet.
2. Pain in the arch of the foot. Common in people with fallen arches or “flat feet”.

Causes:

1. Drastic changes in activity level: Starting a jogging/ running program and doing too many miles before your body adapts, walking on a hard concrete floor all day at a job: wait staff, dock loaders/ unloaders, etc.
2. Health history: People who are diabetic are more susceptible to foot problems because of poor blood flow to the tissues. Poor nutrition: eating an imbalanced diet can cause tissues to heal more slowly.
3. Poor footwear: People often get increased symptoms in the summer with wearing flop flops that have poor arch support. This is often coupled with an increase in walking or other activities because the weather is nicer.

Prevention and treatments:

First of all, it is important to see a doctor to rule out a stress fracture!

1. Footwear: Most people don't realize that running shoes should be replaced about every 500 miles. When shoes are placed on the floor, look at the heels. Are they lopsided? Toss 'em!
For daily wear, many people have good results with wearing clogs (a rigid non-flexible sole). This lets the fascia rest and recover while preventing over stretching of the arch.
2. Orthotics: Most insurance plans won't cover orthotic replacements before 12 months, but orthotics, when worn as directed, only give benefit for 6 months. Many people that come to our clinic have had their orthotics for 18-24 months!
3. Stretch and Strengthen: People with plantar fasciitis often have tight calf muscles. Tight calf muscles can cause plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendonitis. Achilles tendonitis and plantar fasciitis are often going on at the same time. Stretch and strengthen calves daily. When initiating a new exercise program, warm up and stretch before getting into any higher intensity activity to avoid damaging connective tissues.
4. Taping: Using athletic tape is a very effective way to support fallen arches. This may take many weeks to see improvements if symptoms are severe, but be persistent. Tape for increased arch support every single day. This lets the stressed out tissues rest and recover. (nismat.org is a wonderful web site for taping and stretching techniques.)
5. Ice and Massage: Use a tennis or a golf ball to massage at the heel and the arch as tolerated. Sit in a chair and push your foot into it. It should feel a little uncomfortable, but be tolerable to perform. (If not, you are doing this too vigorously.) Use ice after weight bearing activities or golf ball massage to prevent inflammation. Ice for up to 20 minutes at a time. 2-3 times a day.

When self- treatment doesn't work, seek a health professional. We can work with a doctor to do more intensive therapies to speed the healing process.