



Plantar Fasciitis

Definition: Inflammation (swelling) of the plantar fascia (a band of connective tissue that helps support the arch of the foot).

Common Terms: Heel pain; arch pain; heel spurs.



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Typical Mechanism of Injury: There are several factors that may lead to plantar fasciitis. They include things like tightness of the calf muscles, high arches of the feet, obesity and flat feet. Recent changes in activities (running program, walking on beach, new shoe wear, etc) may also lead to plantar fasciitis.

Common Signs and Symptoms: Pain first thing in the morning (with the first step out of bed) and pain on the bottom of the foot are the most common complaints. The pain is often sharp and stabbing although may also be throbbing and achy. There may be pain to the touch between the heel and the arch or increased pain when stretching the arch and toes. Sometimes the pain will decrease during activity but return very shortly afterwards.

Common Treatment: Treatment for plantar fasciitis begins with rest (stopping any activities or shoe wear that aggravate it), ice and sometimes medications for pain and swelling. A heel cup may be used in the shoe to cushion and lift the heel. Ice massage (rolling back and forth across a frozen water bottle) may also be helpful. One of the most important things to do is stretch the calf and heel cord and the bottom of the foot. Physical therapy for modalities such as ultrasound and electrical muscle stimulation may also be helpful. Sometimes wearing a splint at night to keep your foot and calf stretched can also be used. In rare cases treatments such as injections, shockwave therapy and surgery may be needed. As symptoms improve a gradual return to activities is advised.

Prevention: Good strength and flexibility should always be maintained by the athlete. Proper footwear may also help to correct any issues related to abnormal foot posture. A good stretch for the plantar fascia is to pull your big toe back while stretching the foot back.

Expectations: Plantar fasciitis can be a very nagging injury and may take anywhere from several weeks to many months to completely go away. It is important to make sure all symptoms are gone before resuming all activities – otherwise the symptoms may return.

DEPARTMENT OF ORTHOPAEDICS & SPORTS MEDICINE

Carol & Frank Morsani Center for Advanced Health Care * 13330 USF Laurel Dr * Tampa, Florida 33612 * (813) 396-9625

* FAX (813) 396-9195 * www.health.usf.edu

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