Plantar Fasciitis

Heel pain is a common complaint that has many causes. One cause of heel pain is inflammation of the tissue on the bottom of the foot. This is called plantar fasciitis.

The plantar (foot) fascia (connective tissue) stretches under the skin across the arch of the foot from the heel to the base of the toes. When this tissue is torn, overused, or stretched, it can become inflamed (fasciitis). Soreness, tenderness, and pain result.

Some causes of plantar fasciitis are standing too long, being overweight, having arches that are either too flat or too high, or wearing nonsupportive hard-soled shoes. Although many people with plantar fasciitis have heel spurs (outgrowths of bone in the heel), spurs are not the cause of plantar fasciitis. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the September 17, 2003, issue of JAMA.

SYMPTOMS OF PLANTAR FASCIITIS

- Heel pain, especially in the early morning or after a period of rest
- Increasing pain with standing
- Pain in the heel after exercising

TREATMENTS FOR PLANTAR FASCIITIS

- Rest
- Arch supports or heel pads (sometimes called orthotics) to be worn in shoes
- Stretching the calf muscles and Achilles tendon (see illustration)
- Ice packs
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen or naproxen
- Reducing excess body weight
- Corticosteroid injections may be used in select cases.
- Surgery may be helpful if other treatments are not successful.

OTHER CAUSES OF HEEL PAIN

It is important to understand that all heel pain is not from plantar fasciitis. Other medical problems can cause foot and heel pain. Diabetes and blood vessel disease, both serious medical problems, can cause heel pain. Arthritis, traumatic injury and bruising, gout, stress fractures (caused by repeated stress on bone), and other diseases can also cause heel pain. Rarely, tumors (either benign or cancerous) or infections can cause heel pain. If you develop persistent heel pain, see your doctor for an evaluation.

Sources: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, American Podiatric Medical Association

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
  www.aapmr.org
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
  www.aaos.org
- American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons
  www.acfas.org
- American Podiatric Medical Association
  www.apma.org

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