

NORTH SCOTTSDALE PODIATRY GROUP

FOOT FACTS: HEEL PAIN

Plantar Fasciitis and Bone Spurs

Plantar fasciitis (fashee-EYE-tiss) is the most common cause of pain on the bottom of the heel. Approximately 2 million patients are treated for this condition every year. Plantar fasciitis occurs when the strong band of tissue that supports the arch of your foot becomes irritated and inflamed.

Anatomy

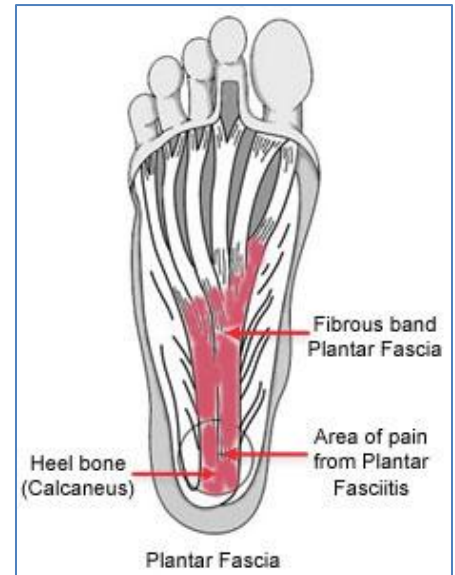
The plantar fascia is a long, thin ligament that lies directly beneath the skin on the bottom of your foot. It connects the heel to the front of your foot, and supports the arch of your foot.

Causes

The plantar fascia is designed to absorb the high stresses and strains we place on our feet. But, sometimes, too much pressure damages or tears the tissues. The body's natural response to injury is inflammation, which results in the heel pain and stiffness of plantar fasciitis. In most cases, plantar fasciitis develops without a specific, identifiable reason.

There are, however, many factors that can make you more prone to the condition:

- Tighter calf muscles that make it difficult to flex your foot and bring your toes up toward your shin
- Obesity
- Very high arch
- Repetitive impact activity (running/sports)
- New or increased activity



Heel Spurs

Although many people with plantar fasciitis have heel spurs, spurs are not the cause of plantar fasciitis pain. One out of 10 people has heel spurs, but only 1 out of 20 people (5%) with heel spurs has foot pain. Because the spur is not the cause of plantar fasciitis, the pain can be treated without removing the spur.



Heel Spurs do not cause plantar fasciitis pain.



Symptoms

The most common symptoms of plantar fasciitis include:

- Pain on the bottom of the foot near the heel
- Pain with the first few steps after getting out of bed in the morning, or after a long period of rest, such as after a long car ride. The pain subsides after a few minutes of walking
- Greater pain after (not during) exercise or activity

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Treatment

More than 90% of patients with plantar fasciitis will improve within 10 months of starting simple treatment methods.

Rest. Decreasing or even stopping the activities that make the pain worse is the first step in reducing the pain. You may need to stop athletic activities where your feet pound on hard surfaces (for example, running or step aerobics).

Ice. Rolling your foot over a cold water bottle or ice for 20 minutes is effective. This can be done 3 to 4 times a day.

Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Medication. Drugs such as ibuprofen or naproxen reduce pain and inflammation. Using the medication for more than 1 month should be reviewed with your doctor.

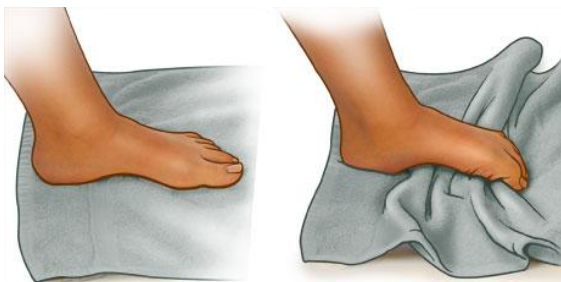
Cortisone Injections. Cortisone, a type of steroid, is a powerful anti-inflammatory medication. It can be injected into the plantar fascia to reduce inflammation and pain. Your doctor may limit your injections. Multiple steroid injections can cause the plantar fascia to rupture (tear), which can lead to a flat foot and chronic pain.

Supportive Shoes and Orthotics. Shoes with thick soles and extra cushioning can reduce pain with standing and walking. As you step and your heel strikes the ground, a significant amount of tension is placed on the fascia, which causes microtrauma (tiny tears in the tissue). A cushioned shoe or insert reduces this tension and the microtrauma that occurs with every step. Pre-made or custom orthotics (shoe inserts) are also helpful.

Night Splints. Most people sleep with their feet pointed down. This relaxes the plantar fascia and is one of the reasons for morning heel pain. A night splint stretches the plantar fascia while you sleep. Although it can be difficult to sleep with, a night splint is very effective and does not have to be used once the pain is gone.

Physical Therapy. Your doctor may suggest that you work with a physical therapist on an exercise program that focuses on stretching your calf muscles and plantar fascia. In addition to exercises like the ones mentioned above, a physical therapy program may involve specialized ice treatments, massage, and medication to decrease inflammation around the plantar fascia.

Exercise. Plantar fasciitis is aggravated by tight muscles in your feet and calves. Stretching your calves and plantar fascia is the most effective way to relieve the pain that comes with this condition.



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Towel Curls

While sitting, place your foot on a towel on the floor and scrunch the towel toward you with your toes.

Then, also using your toes, push the towel away from you. Make this exercise more challenging by placing a weighted object, such as a soup can, on the other end of the towel.

Relax, then repeat the towel curl.

Do twice a day or as prescribed by your doctor.

Towel/Band Pull

A towel pull can be done using a towel or a rubber Thera-Band given to you by your doctor.

Hold the ends of the towel, and loop the middle around your toes.

Keep your knee straight with your toes pointing up.

Pull the towel ends, pulling your toes towards your body.

Hold for 10-15 seconds, then relax.

Do twice a day or as prescribed by your doctor.

