

Plantar fasciitis

Definition

Plantar fasciitis (PLAN-tur fas-e-I-tis) is one of the most common causes of heel pain. It involves pain and inflammation of a thick band of tissue, called the plantar fascia, that runs across the bottom of your foot and connects your heel bone to your toes.

Plantar fasciitis commonly causes stabbing pain that usually occurs with your very first steps in the morning. Once your foot limbers up, the pain of plantar fasciitis normally decreases, but it may return after long periods of standing or after getting up from a seated position.

Plantar fasciitis is particularly common in runners. In addition, people who are overweight and those who wear shoes with inadequate support are at risk of plantar fasciitis.

Symptoms

Plantar fasciitis typically causes a stabbing pain in the bottom of your foot near the heel. The pain is usually worst with the first few steps after awakening, although it can also be triggered by long periods of standing or getting up from a seated position.

Causes

Under normal circumstances, your plantar fascia acts like a shock-absorbing bowstring, supporting the arch in your foot. If tension on that bowstring becomes too great, it can create small tears in the fascia. Repetitive stretching and tearing can cause the fascia to become irritated or inflamed.

Complications

Ignoring plantar fasciitis may result in chronic heel pain that hinders your regular activities. If you change the way you walk to minimize plantar fasciitis pain, you might also develop foot, knee, hip or back problems.

Treatments and drugs

Most people who have plantar fasciitis recover with conservative treatments in just a few months.

Medications

Pain relievers such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) and naproxen (Aleve) may ease the pain and inflammation associated with plantar fasciitis.

Therapies

Stretching and strengthening exercises or use of specialized devices may provide symptom relief. These include:



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- **Physical therapy.** A physical therapist can instruct you in a series of exercises to stretch the plantar fascia and Achilles tendon and to strengthen lower leg muscles, which stabilize your ankle and heel. A therapist may also teach you to apply athletic taping to support the bottom of your foot.
- **Night splints.** Your physical therapist or doctor may recommend wearing a splint that stretches your calf and the arch of your foot while you sleep. This holds the plantar fascia and Achilles tendon in a lengthened position overnight and facilitates stretching.
- **Orthotics.** Your doctor may prescribe off-the-shelf heel cups, cushions or custom-fitted arch supports (orthotics) to help distribute pressure to your feet more evenly.

Surgical or other procedures

When more-conservative measures aren't working, your doctor might recommend:

- **Steroid shots.** Injecting a type of steroid medication into the tender area can provide temporary pain relief. Multiple injections aren't recommended because they can weaken your plantar fascia and possibly cause it to rupture, as well as shrink the fat pad covering your heel bone.
- **Extracorporeal shock wave therapy.** In this procedure, sound waves are directed at the area of heel pain to stimulate healing. It's usually used for chronic plantar fasciitis that hasn't responded to more-conservative treatments. This procedure may cause bruises, swelling, pain, numbness or tingling and has not been shown to be consistently effective.
- **Surgery.** Few people need surgery to detach the plantar fascia from the heel bone. It's generally an option only when the pain is severe and all else fails. Side effects include a weakening of the arch in your foot.

Lifestyle and home remedies

To reduce the pain of plantar fasciitis, try these self-care tips:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** This minimizes the stress on your plantar fascia.
- **Choose supportive shoes.** Avoid high heels. Buy shoes with a low to moderate heel, good arch support and shock absorbency. Don't go barefoot, especially on hard surfaces.
- **Don't wear worn-out athletic shoes.** Replace your old athletic shoes before they stop supporting and cushioning your feet. If you're a runner, buy new shoes after about 500 miles of use.
- **Change your sport.** Try a low-impact sport, such as swimming or bicycling, instead of walking or jogging.
- **Apply ice.** Hold a cloth-covered ice pack over the area of pain for 15 to 20 minutes three or four times a day or after activity. Or try ice massage. Freeze a water-filled paper cup and roll it over the site of discomfort for about five to seven minutes. Regular ice massage can help reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Stretch your arches.** Simple home exercises can stretch your plantar fascia, Achilles tendon and calf muscles.