

NEWS & NOTES

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getting back on your feet

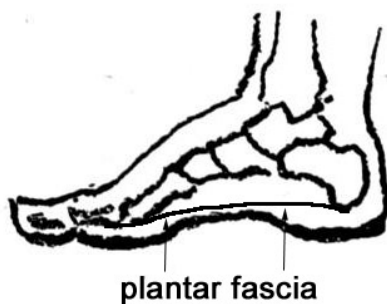
I have had a lot of clients recently with plantar fasciitis! This nagging foot pain is very common, so here's an explanation of what's happening and how to care for it.

THE SYMPTOMS

Pain is felt on the sole of the foot, often most intensely at the heel. Commonly, it is most severe when stepping onto the foot after a long period of rest, as when getting out of bed in the morning. Usually the pain is at its worst when starting an activity, improving as you go on. Sometimes the pain returns after extended activity. The bottom of the foot may also feel hot or swollen.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Plantar fasciitis is inflammation of the plantar fascia resulting from overuse and repetitive strain. Plantar fascia is a tough layer of connective tissue on the bottom of the foot, spanning from the heel to the ball of the foot (see illustration). Its main role is to maintain and support the longitudinal



arch of the foot, functioning as part of the shock-absorbing design.

The cause of plantar fasciitis is a combination of factors. It is a repetitive strain injury that can involve tight muscles, improper shoes, overuse, gait or other biomechanical problems. People with very low or very high arches have a greater risk of developing plantar fasciitis.

Repetitive strain leads to repeated microscopic tearing of the tissue, which causes inflammation and pain. As the body repairs the tears, adhesions form. With repeated tearing, these layers of "scar tissue bandages" can become quite thick. They are also much less flexible than uninjured tissue, leaving you vulnerable to further tearing and injury. The pain felt when stepping out of bed in the morning is from re-injury of the plantar fascia. The tissue is being re-torn and that hurts!

HOW MASSAGE HELPS

Massage can be quite effective as part of a comprehensive plan to treat plantar fasciitis. It addresses the primary tissue strain *and* the secondary muscle involvement.

Massage techniques help to mobilize the plantar fascia and to break up adhesions, as well as elongating the fibers. Releasing tight muscles in the calf and foot is essential to breaking the cycle. Regular treatments by a massage therapist for this specific

work can greatly improve the healing process.

SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES

The object in treating plantar fasciitis is to reduce the inflammation and allow the damaged tissues to heal. This involves attention not only to the immediate problem of pain, but to the biomechanical causes and aggravating activities.

Ice reduces inflammation, swelling and pain. Apply ice after exercise or work to reduce pain and inflammation. Much of the literature on this subject recommends ice massage for 5 to 10 minutes or applying an ice pack for 15 to 20 minutes. (If you have diabetes or other reasons you shouldn't ice your feet, please check with your doctor before icing your plantar fascia!)

Rest and modification of the activities that perpetuate the problem are essential. This means getting off your feet. Talk to your doctor about developing a modified rest program that would allow you to keep doing the things you need to do, while giving your feet a break. Keep in mind that the longer your plantar fasciitis goes untreated, the longer it will take to heal.

Self-massage and stretching are an important part of the self-care program. Tools are helpful for massaging the bottom of your foot. Try using a

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golf ball or a tool designed especially for foot massage. Routine stretching and massage of the calf muscles is also important. Gently stretch and massage your foot and calf before getting out of bed and before activity during the day.

OTHER COMMON TREATMENTS

To correct the biomechanical problems involved, your doctor may suggest changing shoes or adding arch supports. Custom-made orthotics are a common treatment. Some people wear night splints, which stretch the tissues while sleeping. Medication to reduce inflammation may be suggested (like aspirin or ibuprofen). Cortisone shots and surgery are considered as treatments of last resort, after less invasive options have been exhausted.

It can be six to eighteen months until plantar fasciitis is fully healed, especially if it has gone untreated for a long time. The time it takes to heal is greatly reduced with early treatment and commitment to self-care: rest, ice, check your biomechanics, stretch, and receive massage therapy. Get back on your feet faster by taking good care of yourself.



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