

Plantar Fasciitis

What is Plantar fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis means inflammation of the plantar fascia. The plantar fascia is a strong band of tissue (similar to a ligament) that stretches from the heel to the middle bones of the foot. It supports the arch of the foot. Small injuries to the plantar fascia can cause inflammation and symptoms. The injury is usually near to where it attaches to the heel bone.

What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis?

Pain is the main symptom. This can be anywhere on the underside of the heel. Commonly one spot is found as the main source of pain. This is often about 4 cms forward from the heel, and may be tender to touch. The pain usually eases on resting the foot, but is often worst when first used in the morning. Gentle exercise may then ease things a little as the day goes by, but a long walk often makes the pain worse. Sudden stretching of the sole of the foot may make the pain worse, for example, walking up stairs or on tip-toes.

What is the treatment for plantar fasciitis?

Usually the inflammation and pain will ease in time. Fascia tissue, like ligament tissue, heals quite slowly. It may take several months or more to go. However, the following may speed recovery. With these measures, recovery is likely to be within weeks rather than months.



- **Footwear** - Do not walk barefoot on hard surfaces. Choose shoes with cushioned heels and a good arch support. A laced sports shoe rather than open sandals is probably best. Avoid old or worn shoes that may not give a good cushion to the heel.
- **Orthotics** - You can buy various pads and shoe inserts to cushion the heel. These work best if you put them in your shoes at all times. Use soft materials. The aim is to raise the heel by about 1 cm. If the heel is very tender, cut a small hole in the heel pad at the site of the most tender spot. The tender part of the heel will not then touch anything inside the shoe at all.
- **Anti-inflammatory Medication** - Anti-inflammatory Medication such as ibuprofen are useful. These are painkillers but also reduce inflammation and may work better than ordinary painkillers.
- **Stretching** - Regular gentle stretching of the Achilles tendon and the plantar fascia will help ease the symptoms. This is because most people with plantar fasciitis have a slight tightness of the Achilles tendon. This tends to pull at the back of the heel and have a direct effect of keeping the plantar fascia tight. Also, when you are asleep overnight, the plantar fascia tends to tighten up (which is why it is usually most painful first thing in the morning).
- **Injections** - A steroid (cortisone) injection is sometimes tried if the pain remains bad despite the above measures. It may relieve the pain for several weeks, or even cure the problem. Steroids work by reducing inflammation. Sometimes 2 or 3 injections are tried over a period of weeks if the first is not successful.
- **Surgery** - Surgery may be considered in very difficult cases. This is usually only advised if the pain has not eased after the treatments listed above have not provided relief of the pain.

If you feel that you are experiencing symptoms consistent with plantar fasciitis please consult your podiatrist for an evaluation and treatment options.