

Plantar Heel Pain

What is it?

Plantar Heel Pain (often referred to as “plantar fasciitis”) is the most common cause of heel pain that we see in our clinic. You feel this pain under the bony area of the heel, and often there is also discomfort through your arch as well.

The plantar fascia is a thick band of fibrous tissue that runs from the heel to the base of the toes. Repetitive strain to the plantar fascia and the muscles of the arch can cause injury and weakening of this ligament and results in pain underneath the heel.

What are the symptoms?

Plantar Heel Pain often begins with you feeling pain in the heel when you first get out of bed in the morning, but as you move around the pain starts to settle and you get on with your day with no further problems. This is the first stage. With time, your pain can then progress to having pain on rising after any period of rest, such as getting up after you have been sitting down for lunch or after you have been sitting in the recliner at the end of the day. This is the second stage. The final stage is when you get out of bed in the morning and that pain remains at some level throughout the whole day.

Why me?

There are a number of factors that increase your risk of developing plantar heel pain. Most cases of plantar heel pain are multifactorial and can be caused by one or more of the following:

- Age – Plantar heel pain can happen to you at any age, however it is really common in the 40 - 60 year age group
- Change in activity – Often the condition will begin after some change in lifestyle. This could be a change in your exercise routine, a change in your working patterns, perhaps an increase in walking at work, surfaces being walked on or work footwear. Many patients have developed plantar fasciitis after moving from a carpeted house to a tiled house
- Poor footwear – poor footwear including footwear that is loose fitting or poorly secured to the foot like thongs, slides and low-cut slip-ons
- Muscle issues – tight and weak foot and leg muscles can contribute to heel pain. If the muscles in the arch, calf or even the hip aren't working as well as they should, they can be contributing to the pain
- Foot structure – everybody's feet function a little differently. Some foot function types can make it more difficult for you to recover from plantar heel pain. Feet that roll in excessively or feet that don't roll in much at all may need special inserts to assist with recovery
- Weight – an increased Body Mass Index (BMI) has been found to be a causative factor in heel pain for some people.

What are some steps I can take now to help?

The first thing to do when you start to develop Plantar Heel Pain is to look at your footwear.

- Are you wearing well fitting, supportive shoes?
This does not have to be a jogger/ running shoe (however these would be a great start and may be required in more advanced



cases). For ladies, it could be a closed heel sandal with adjustable straps holding the shoe onto the foot (straps that you tighten, not just slip into) and for men moving from slip on shoes to a lace up.

- If you already have “good shoes”, check them for wear. Put your shoes on a flat surface and look at them from behind. Is the heel of the shoe leaning excessively in or out? If so, that is a sign that they may not be holding your feet in the best position (follow this link for a video of this test - <https://youtu.be/3vnqzcgY0gg>)
- Another good test is the “wobble test”. Again, with your shoes on a flat surface, lift one edge of the shoe and then let go and see how quickly your shoe settles flat on the table. If your shoes continue to wobble after a few seconds, your shoes are no longer a stable platform for you to walk on and can contribute to overuse of your foot and leg muscles (follow this link for a video of this test - <https://youtu.be/ZAyAsRO-uuQ>)
- Avoid walking in thongs, flip-flops or slides as these shoes can overwork your arch and leg muscles. For the ladies, ballet flats are also a “no-no”, as they can cause excessive stress under the foot.

Other steps you can try at home are:

- Stretching your arch and calf muscles to reduce the stress under the heel.
- You may experience some relief by icing the area (rolling on a frozen water bottle is common). While this is giving immediate relief, it is important to remember that it is treating the symptoms, and not the underlying cause.

What if these steps are not working?

Everybody responds differently to treatment. If the above steps are not helping to alleviate your heel pain, then it is time to see us for some professional advice and treatment.

We will make sure that Plantar Heel Pain is the correct diagnosis for your condition. We will do a thorough assessment and take into account all the factors that are causing your pain and develop a treatment plan to get you back to your activities as quickly as possible.

Treatment of plantar fasciitis is aimed at achieving two goals; firstly, to reduce the pain associated with your plantar fasciitis, and secondly, to reduce the tension and strain on the injured ligament to prevent further damage and allow the area to heal.

Our treatment programs will include a personalised mix of the following options:

- Massage/ release of soft tissue structures
- Stretching and strengthening exercises
- Padding and strapping to relieve
- Customized orthotics
- Assisting you to choose the correct footwear
- Foot mobilisation
- Dry needling
- Icing
- Anti-inflammatories (if suitable)

The majority of people suffering with plantar fasciitis respond well to a treatment plan consisting of the above measures. However, in some more severe cases your Podiatrist may suggest further treatments including night splints, injections and referral to a surgeon.

Disclaimer: This information sheet is a guide only to plantar heel pain. Please be aware that there are several conditions that can mimic plantar heel pain and that this Fact Sheet is not a substitute for, nor is it intended to replace, the services of a qualified health practitioner.



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