



Plantar Fasciitis

You have a sharp, shooting pain in your heel when you step out of bed. It lessens as you move around, gets worse after exercise and always seems to come back the next day. You change your stride to avoid putting pressure on the heel, but that doesn't seem to work. You can't recall a specific incident when you hurt your foot; you're just tired of the pain. Your doctor tells you that you have plantar fasciitis. Now it's time to plan your strategy for healing.

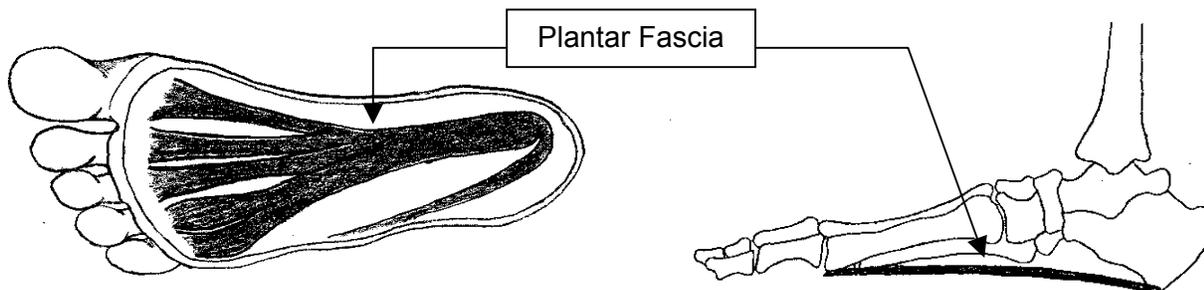
What This Pain is All About

The *plantar fascia* is a thick tissue that connects the heel to the ball of the foot. It provides arch support and protects the foot's sensitive inner components. Running and activities such as soccer or tennis may aggravate the plantar fascia and cause inflammation. Doctors diagnose this condition as *plantar fasciitis* ((plantar fashee-i-tis).

Symptoms of plantar fasciitis include tenderness or pain on the inner sole near the heel, which is usually worse first thing in the morning or getting up after inactivity. It can increase with weight-bearing activity, especially *after* exercise. Many feel a sharp pain that becomes a dull ache, like a "stone bruise" that generally subsides after walking a few steps. Those most susceptible are women, overweight individuals, people with standing and/or walking intensive jobs, and running-sport athletes. A heel spur may result from plantar fasciitis, but it is *not* the cause.

Doctors have generated many theories regarding plantar fasciitis, but haven't yet agreed upon one main cause. Possible contributors include excessive pronation, tight calf muscles, weak small muscles in the foot and poor shoe choice.

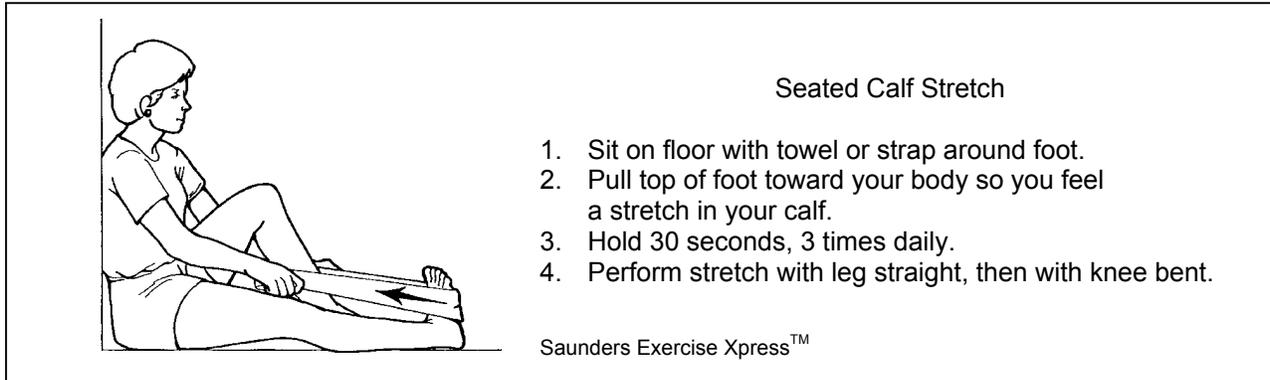
1. **Pronation** describes how the foot rolls in toward the center of the body and the foot flattens out under the body's weight during walking or running. You may have heard of someone being "flat-footed," which typically means his/her foot excessively pronates. This biomechanical pattern increases tension in the plantar fascia, and over time may cause inflammation.
2. **Tight calf muscles** (including the Achilles tendon) can change your gait (walking pattern), altering the way your heel strikes the ground. This may irritate the plantar fascia.
3. **Poor shoe choice** includes wearing athletic/street shoes with poor arch support and heels that are too high, too hard or too soft. Good shoes support the foot and reduce strain on the plantar fascia.



Getting Better

Unfortunately, injuries like plantar fasciitis are not easily or quickly resolved. Seventy-five percent of patients heal within six months, while 98% heal within twelve months. You'll need a lot of patience! However, there are things you can do to alleviate the pain and speed up your recovery.

4. STOP the aggravating activity until you are pain free. This is one of the most important things you can do. Be forewarned: this may take a while. But YOU WILL NOT GET BETTER if you continue to aggravate the condition.
5. Ice the bottom of your foot, including your heel, several times/day by rolling a cold can of soda or an ice cup over the affected area. This creates a friction ice massage to reduce inflammation.
6. Decrease Achilles tendon and calf muscle tightness by using a towel to stretch your lower leg while sitting down. Stretching your toes will also help.



7. If you'd like to stay in shape while recovering, utilize non-weight-bearing activities such as deep water running, water aerobics, swimming, cycling, rowing or upper body strength training. Remember, you must be PAIN FREE during exercise or you'll sabotage the healing process!

Your doctor may...

1. Recommend a visco heel to cushion your fascia or orthotics to correct foot pronation and support your arch. Visco heels are available at a surgical supply store.
2. Suggest a tension night splint to stretch the Achilles tendon.
3. Prescribe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications and/or physical therapy to reduce discomfort.
4. Use cortisone injections as a treatment option. Many doctors do not use these injections and feel that an injection increases the risk of rupturing the fascia. Such treatment is controversial.
5. Propose surgery to release the fascia. This is RARE and should be considered a last resort.

Ways to Prevent Plantar Fasciitis and its Recurrence

- The KEY to prevention is STRETCHING. Keep your calves and Achilles tendon flexible to avoid trouble with the plantar fascia.
- Change your running/athletic shoes frequently (every 6 months or 350 miles, whichever comes first). Cushioning and arch support can wear down quickly.
- Avoid consecutive days of exercise on hard surfaces. Vary workouts between pavement and surfaces like grass, dirt, or a soft running track that "give" when you train on them.
- Lose weight if necessary.

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