

Plantar Fascia Pain

What is it?

The plantar fascia is a strong soft tissue structure supporting the arch of the foot. Plantar Fasciitis is a painful heel condition which affects 10% of us over a lifetime. It accounts for 25% of foot problems in athletes. Degenerative changes are often found in the injured tendon at its' attachment to the heel bone. Heel spurs are often seen on Xray, but have no impact on getting plantar fascia pain, or recovery time.

Symptoms

The most striking feature of plantar fasciitis is disabling pain taking the first steps out of bed or after prolonged sitting. Pain can sometimes ease with movement, but is often aggravated by prolonged standing and walking, or running. Reduced exercise levels due to pain can lead to weight gain, increased pain and poor health outcomes- it is vital to act early to stay active and shorten recovery time. Almost half of those with plantar fascia pain will still have some symptoms 10 years later, those that get better can take up to two years!

Risk Factors

- Most common at age 40-60 years old
- Being overweight.
- Excessive Foot pronation (flat foot)
- Stiff toe and ankle joints, tight calf and hamstring muscles
- Jobs involving prolonged standing or walking

Treatment:

The scientific research shows a number of treatment options are moderately effective in reducing pain and improving function. None of these have been shown to be superior to the others. There are no magic pills and a patient approach trialling a number of strategies usually gets the best result. Unfortunately, plantar fasciitis can cause symptoms over a long period of time, testing the patience of both the sufferer and the Physio!

- Stretching exercises: of the plantar fascia, calf and hamstring
- Strengthening exercises: of the calf, intrinsic foot muscles and plantar fascia
- Taping or Orthotics: to offload the plantar fascia and support the arch
- Night splints or sock: to provide long duration gentle stretch
- Shockwave Therapy: can be used but is not well tolerated by everyone
- Cortisone injection: can be effective for short-term pain relief, with possible side effects including plantar fascia rupture

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