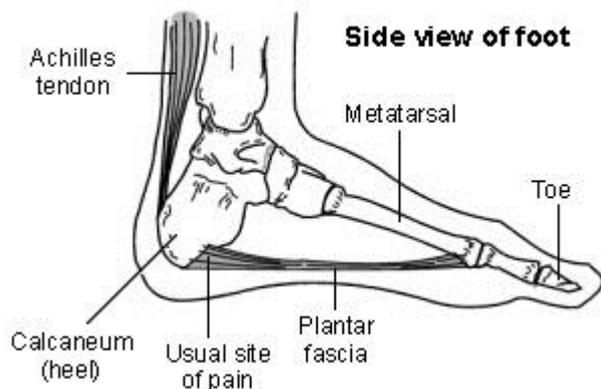


Plantar Fasciitis: Advice Sheet & Exercises

Plantar fasciitis causes pain under your heel. It usually goes in time but treatment may speed up your recovery. Treatments include rest, good footwear, heel pads, painkillers, and exercises. A steroid injection or other treatments may be used in more severe cases, so please speak to your GP if symptoms persist or become too uncomfortable for daily living.



Plantar fasciitis means inflammation of your plantar fascia. Your plantar fascia is a strong band of tissue (like a ligament) that stretches from your heel to your middle foot bones. It supports the arch of your foot and also acts as a shock-absorber in your foot.

Repeated small injuries to the fascia (with or without inflammation) are thought to be the cause of plantar fasciitis. The injury is usually near to where the plantar fascia attaches to your heel bone

You are more likely to injure your plantar fascia in certain situations. For example:

- If you are on your feet for a lot of the time, or if you do lots of walking, running, standing, etc, when you are not used to it.
- If you have recently started exercising on a different surface - for example, running on the road instead of a track.
- If you have been wearing shoes with poor cushioning or poor arch support.
- If you are overweight - this will put extra strain on your heel.
- If there is overuse or sudden stretching of your sole. For example: athletes who increase running intensity or distance; poor technique starting 'off the blocks', etc.
- If you have a tight Achilles tendon (the big tendon at the bottom of your calf muscles above your heel). This can affect your ability to flex your ankle and make you more likely to damage your plantar fascia.

What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis?

Pain is the main symptom. This can be anywhere on the underside of your heel. However, commonly, one spot is found as the main source of pain. This is often about 4 cm forward from your heel, and may be tender to touch. The pain is often worst when you take your first steps on getting up in the morning, or after long periods of rest where no weight is placed on your foot. Gentle exercise may ease things a little as the day goes by, but a long walk or being on your feet for a long time often makes the pain worse. Resting your foot usually eases the pain. Sudden stretching of the sole of your foot may make the pain worse - for example, walking up stairs or on tiptoes.

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What is the initial treatment for plantar fasciitis?

Usually, the 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 treatments may help to speed recovery. A combination of different treatments may help.

1. Rest your foot

This should be done as much as possible. Avoid running, excess walking or standing, and undue stretching of your sole. Gentle walking and exercises described below are fine.

2. Footwear

Do not walk barefoot on hard surfaces. Choose shoes with cushioned heels and a good arch support. A laced sports shoe rather than an open sandal is probably best. Avoid old or worn shoes that may not give a good cushion to your heel.

3. Heel pads and arch supports

You can buy various pads and shoe inserts to cushion the heel and support the arch of your foot. These work best if you put them in your shoes at all times. The aim is to raise your heel by about 1 cm. If your heel is tender, cut a small hole in the heel pad at the site of the tender spot. This means that the tender part of your heel will not touch anything inside your shoe. Place the inserts/pads in both shoes, even if you only have pain in one foot.

4. Pain relief (medication should only be taken after seeking advice from your GP)

Painkillers such as paracetamol will often ease the pain. Sometimes anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen are useful. Gels and creams containing anti-inflammatory ingredients could also provide relief. An ice pack (such as a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel) held to your foot for 10-15 minutes may also help to relieve pain.

5. Exercises

Regular, gentle stretching of your Achilles tendon and plantar fascia may help to ease your symptoms. This is because most people with plantar fasciitis have a slight tightness of their Achilles tendon. If this is the case, it tends to pull at the back of your heel and has a knock-on effect of keeping your plantar fascia tight. Also, when you are asleep overnight, your plantar fascia tends to tighten up (which is why it is usually most painful first thing in the morning). The aim of these exercises is to loosen up the tendons and fascia gently above and below your heel.

The following exercises can be used to help treat plantar fasciitis:



Standing calf Stretch:

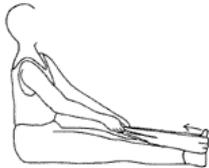
Stand about 40 cm away from a wall and put both hands on the wall at shoulder height, feet slightly apart, with one foot in front of the other. Bend your front knee but keep your back knee straight and lean in towards the wall to stretch. You should feel your calf muscle tighten. Keep this position for several seconds, then relax. Do this about 10 times then switch to the other leg. Now repeat the same exercise for both legs but this time, bring your back foot forward slightly so that your back knee is also slightly bent. Lean against the wall as before, keep the position, relax and then repeat 10 times before switching to the other leg. Repeat this routine twice a day

Plantar Fascia Stretch:

Stand on the bottom step of some stairs with your legs slightly apart and with your heels just off the end of the step. Hold the stair rails for support. Lower your heels, keeping your knees straight. Again you should feel the stretch in your calves. Keep the position for 20-60 seconds, then relax. Repeat six times. Try to do this exercise twice a day



Towel Stretch:



Sit on the floor with your legs out in front of you. Loop a towel around the ball of one of your feet. With your knee straight, pull your toes towards your nose. Hold the position for 30 seconds and repeat three times. Repeat the same exercise for the other foot. Try to do this once a day.

Roller:

For this exercise you need an object such as a rolling pin, drinks can or tennis ball. Whilst sitting in a chair, put the object under the arch of your foot. Roll the arch of your foot over the object backwards and forwards. Perform this exercise for a few minutes for each foot at least twice a day



Pick Up:



Sit on a chair with your knees bent and marbles scattered at your feet (or a towel). Using your toes pick up the objects in front of you. If you are using marbles place a cup close to you and try to collect all the marbles in this. Repeat this exercise until all of the marbles have been collected. If you are using a towel pick it up and place it in a different location, then pick it up again and repeat. Do this exercise twice a day.

What is the outlook (prognosis) for plantar fasciitis?

Most people have completely recovered from an episode of plantar fasciitis within a year. However, some of the treatments described above may help to speed up your recovery.

Can plantar fasciitis be prevented?

There are certain things that you can do to try to prevent plantar fasciitis, especially if you have had it before. These include:

- Regularly changing training shoes used for running or walking.
- Wearing shoes with good cushioning in the heels and good arch support.
- Losing weight if you are overweight.
- Regularly stretching the plantar fascia and Achilles tendon, especially before exercise.
- Avoiding exercising on hard surfaces.

Often there is no apparent cause for plantar fasciitis, particularly in older people. A common misconception is that the pain is due to a bony growth or 'spur' coming from the heel bone (calcaneum). Many people have a bony spur of the heel bone but not everyone with this gets plantar fasciitis.