

Parish Health News



Plantar fasciitis (PLAN-tur fas-e-I-tis) is one of the most common causes of heel pain. It involves pain and inflammation of a thick band of tissue, called the plantar fascia that runs across the bottom of your foot and connects your heel bone to your toes.

Plantar fasciitis commonly causes stabbing pain that usually occurs with your very first steps in the morning. Once your foot limbers up, the pain of plantar fasciitis normally decreases, but it may return after long periods of standing or after getting up from a seated position.

Risk factors

- **Age.** Plantar fasciitis is most common between the ages of 40 and 60.
- **Certain types of exercise.** Activities that place a lot of stress on your heel and attached tissue — such as long-distance running, ballet dancing and dance aerobics — can contribute to an earlier onset of plantar fasciitis.
- **Faulty foot mechanics.** Being flat-footed, having a high arch or even having an abnormal pattern of walking can adversely affect the way weight is distributed when you're standing and put added stress on the plantar fascia.
- **Obesity.** Excess pounds put extra stress on your plantar fascia.
- **Occupations that keep you on your feet.** Factory workers, teachers and others who spend most of their work hours walking or standing on hard surfaces can damage their plantar fascia.
- **Therapies**
- **Physical therapy.** A physical therapist can instruct you in a series of exercises to stretch the plantar fascia and Achilles tendon and to strengthen lower leg muscles, which stabilize your ankle and heel. A therapist may also teach you to apply athletic taping to support the bottom of your foot.
- **Night splints.** Your physical therapist or doctor may recommend wearing a splint that stretches your calf and the arch of your foot while you sleep. This holds the plantar fascia and Achilles tendon in a lengthened position overnight and facilitates stretching.
- **Orthotics.** Your doctor may prescribe off-the-shelf heel cups, cushions or custom-fitted arch supports (orthotics) to help distribute pressure to your feet more evenly.

Lifestyle and home remedies

To reduce the pain of plantar fasciitis, try these self-care tips:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** This minimizes the stress on your plantar fascia.
- **Choose supportive shoes.** Avoid high heels. Buy shoes with a low to moderate heel, good arch support and shock absorbency. Don't go barefoot, especially on hard surfaces.
- **Don't wear worn-out athletic shoes.** Replace your old athletic shoes before they stop supporting and cushioning your feet. If you're a runner, buy new shoes after about 500 miles of use.
- **Change your sport.** Try a low-impact sport, such as swimming or bicycling, instead of walking or jogging.
- **Apply ice.** Hold a cloth-covered ice pack over the area of pain for 15 to 20 minutes three or four times a day or after activity. Or try ice massage. Freeze a water-filled paper cup and roll it over the site of discomfort for about five to seven minutes. Regular ice massage can help reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Stretch your arches.** Simple home exercises can stretch your plantar fascia, Achilles tendon and calf muscles.

Information from the Mayo Clinic
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