

# Plantar Fasciitis



## What is it?

Plantar fasciitis is a common foot condition that causes pain in the heel, across the sole of the foot and into the arch of the foot. It is caused by irritation of the 'plantar fascia' ligament connecting the heel to the ball of the foot.

It plays an important role in supporting the arch of your foot by taking the strain when you stand, walk or run.

Around 1 in 10 people will get plantar fasciitis at some point in their life.

## What are the symptoms?

The main symptom is pain in the heel. It can also be felt in the arch area of the foot. The pain can be described as a sharp, burning or an aching pain, usually more noticeable when you stand on the foot.

E.g. when you get up in the morning or when you have been stood or sat for a while.

It gradually eases as you move however pain can return as the day goes on or after long periods of time on your feet.

## What are the causes?

Plantar fasciitis can effect anybody, common factors which may increase your risk include:

- Foot position – it is more common in people with high arched feet
- Tight muscles – this can affect your ability to move your ankle
- Poor footwear – unsupportive shoes that have thin soles, loose fit, no arch support e.g. crocs, converse, flip flops, UGG boots.
- Changing the type of surface you exercise on or suddenly increasing the amount of exercise you do.
- Excessive weight

## How can I treat this? - Rest/modified activity

- Initially reduce your activity levels to allow the healing process to begin and gradually increase the amount of activity you do.
- Alter your activities to reduce the amount of time spent on your feet in one go. E.g. instead of running or walking go for a bike ride or go swimming.

## Pain management

- Anti-inflammatory medicines e.g. ibuprofen may help but should only be started after consultation with your GP.
- Applying ice wrapped in a cloth or tea towel to the affected area for 10-15 minutes – this can be done after exercise or 2-3 times a day. **CAUTION** – do not apply ice for longer than 15 minutes or directly onto the skin as this can cause ice burns.

Applying heat or having a warm bath can ease the pain. Do not apply ice or heat if you have reduced sensation in that area.

## Footwear

Wear supportive footwear with a stiff, cushioned sole. Avoid flip flops and unsupportive shoes.

## Stretching

Research has shown that regular stretches are important in the treatment of plantar fasciitis. These stretches should be done daily.

### Stretch 1 - Calf stretch – Gastrocnemius muscle



Using a wall or surface for support. Stand with your feet hip width apart and take a step forwards. Keep both feet facing forwards, keep your back leg straight and front knee slightly bent with both heels on the floor. Gradually lean your weight forwards stretching the back leg.

Hold this for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

### Stretch 2 – Calf stretch – Soleus muscle



Using a wall or surface for support. Stand with your feet hip width apart and take a step forwards. Keep both feet facing forwards and heels on the floor. Bend both knees until you feel a stretch in the lower calf of your back leg.

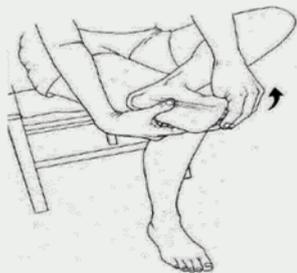
Hold this for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

### Stretch 3 – Plantar fascia stretch



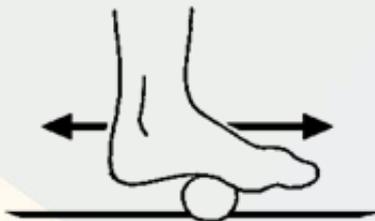
Place a towel around the ball of your foot, pull the towel towards you so you can feel a stretch in the sole of your foot.

Alternatively:



Use your hand to pull your toes towards you so you can feel a stretch in the sole of your foot. Gently massage the instep of your foot with your other hand as shown in the image to the left. Hold this for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

### Stretch 4 – Tennis ball or water bottle massage



While sat in a chair, roll a small hard ball under your foot e.g. tennis or golf ball.

OR fill a plastic bottle with water and freeze it.

Place a towel over the top of the bottle to prevent an ice burn and gently roll your bare foot backwards and forwards over the bottle for a few minutes.

### Other treatments:

Referral for insoles – If you follow the advice in this leaflet and your symptoms do not resolve a referral to orthotics for assessment for supportive insoles may be needed.

If you are seeing an improvement with the advice and stretches above continue with these until your symptoms have resolved. If symptoms return in the future, begin the treatments above

If your symptoms worsen or if you are concerned about your condition contact your GP, 111 or 999.

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