Heel Pain: Plantar Fascitis & Bone Spurs

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Heel Pain

Heel pain is a common condition in which when weight bearing causes extreme discomfort in the heel and or arch of the foot.

What causes heel pain?

There are two different categories of heel pain. The first is caused by over-use repetitive stress which refers to a soreness resulting from too much impact on a specific area of the foot. This condition, often referred to as "heel pain syndrome," can be caused by shoes with heels that are too low, a thinned out fat pad in the heel area, or from a sudden increase in activity.

Plantar Fasciitis, pronounced PLAN-tar-fashee-EYE-tis.

The Plantar Fascia is a broad band of tough fibrous tissue which runs along the bottom surface of the foot, attaching at the bottom of the heel bone and extending to the forefoot. It encapsulates the muscles in the bottom of the foot, and provides vital support of the arch by acting like a bow string connecting the heel bone to the ball of the foot.

Plantar Fasciitis is essentially, inflammation of this connective tissue due to poor mechanics of the foot bones and muscles caused by excessive stretching of the plantar fascia. When the plantar fascia is excessively stretched, this can cause plantar fasciitis, which can also lead to heel pain, arch pain, pain when weight bearing and walking and heel spurs. Over time, scar tissue develops making the fascia less flexible. This in turn causes further traction in other parts of the foot eventually leading to heal spurs.

What causes plantar fasciitis?

The excessive stretching of the plantar fascia that leads to the inflammation and discomfort can be caused by the following:

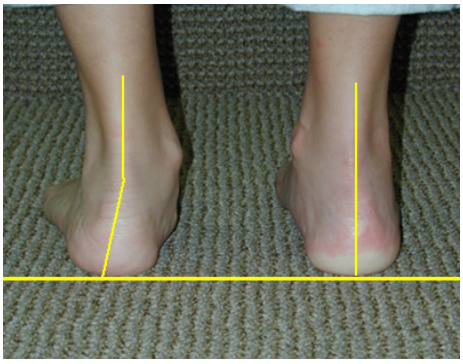
- Over-pronation (flat feet) which results in the arch collapsing upon weight bearing
- A foot with an unusually high arch
- A sudden increase in physical activity
- Excessive weight on the foot, usually attributed to obesity or pregnancy
- Improperly fitting footwear


Normal Arch


Flat Arch

Over-pronation (flat feet) is the leading cause of plantar fasciitis. Over-pronation occurs in the walking process, when a person's arch collapses upon weight bearing, causing the plantar fascia to be stretched away from the heel bone. With Plantar Fasciitis, the bottom of your foot usually hurts near the inside of the foot where the heel and arch meet. The pain is often acute either first thing in the morning or after a long rest, because while resting the plantar fascia contracts back to its original shape. As the day progresses and the plantar fascia continues to be stretched, the pain often subsides.

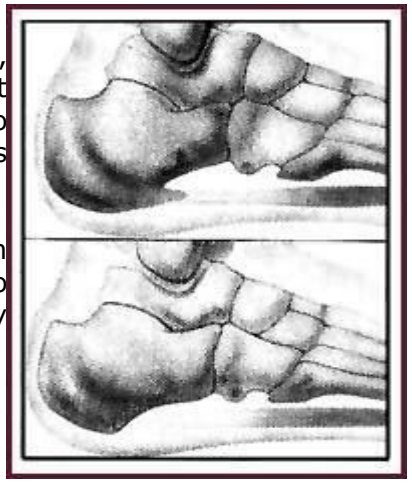
Surveys show that overweight patients and/or those leading a sedentary lifestyle have a much higher incidence of heel pain, in fact recent reports indicate that over 2.5 million new cases are reported each year in the USA.



Bone Spurs

Over time due to poor foot mechanics and frequent episodes of inflammation, the increase stress and tension from the stretched plantar fascia, the bone responds to this stress by producing new bone along the insertion of the fascia where it meets at the heel bone (calcaneus). This is best diagnosed by radiographs (x-rays) of the heel.

Treatment



If the pain is severe, anti-inflammatory medications are often prescribed, and in extreme cases, a cortisone injection to the heel is administered. But these are only temporary pain reducing treatments, and these options do not correct the cause, merely cover the symptoms. But in extreme cases this may be useful to quickly reduce your pain.

Mobilization and manipulation of the bones in the foot, combined with stretching exercises of the muscles of the foot and lower leg will help to correct the cause. Therapies such as ultrasound therapy, cold laser therapy and ice will reduce pain and inflammation.

Wearing supportive shoes that have a cushioned heel to absorb shock, and elevating the heel with the use of a heel cradle or heel cup. Heel cradles and heel cups provide extra comfort, cushion the heel, and reduce the amount of shock and shear forces placed during everyday activities.

Every time your foot strikes the ground, the plantar fascia is stretched which can cause heel pain. You can reduce the strain and stress on the plantar fascia by following these simple instructions:

Avoid running on hard or uneven ground, lose any excess weight, and wear supportive shoes and that support your arch to prevent over-stretching of the plantar fascia. Most shoes do not provide sufficient support for those with low arches or flat feet.

Orthotics are often required to correct the poor arch and foot mechanics, which will help to correct the cause of pain, prevent further bone spur growth and other arthritic changes in the foot, and often lead to knee and back pain.

To effectively manage these foot disorders, a more appropriate treatment approach is to evaluate the entire kinetic chain. This means we must examine the foot, ankle, knee and low back mechanics. We must address each area of muscle imbalance to restore proper joint and muscle function. Properly addressing each are will reduce pain, increase range of motion, improve balance and coordination while preventing degenerative changes associated with aging. We also use Whole Body Vibration therapy to reduce pain, inflammation and stretch tight muscles and connective tissues.

We offer custom and semi-custom orthotics in our office or for at-home ordering.

Call to schedule an examination or to order orthotics.

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