Orthopedics 101:

PLANTAR FACIITIS

What Causes ‘Heel Pain’ and Best Treatments to Keep You on Your Feet

By Dr. Aaranson
If you’ve ever had plantar fasciitis, you know a new type of pain.

Approximately ten percent of all U.S. adults suffer from some form of plantar fasciitis. This leads to over one million doctor visits in the U.S. alone every year for treatment.¹ Patients suffering from plantar fasciitis spend between $192M-$376M in the U.S. every year.² This condition, commonly referred to as ‘heel pain’, affects people from all walks of life, from steel workers to office staff, even Albert Pujols as recently as 2013.

We want this resource to help patients recover from plantar fasciitis with nonsurgical treatments, as much as possible, and avoid future flare-ups. The best place to start is knowing what causes plantar fasciitis.

Many patients have a myriad of questions when it comes to treating this condition:

1. What are the telltale symptoms of plantar fasciitis and what causes it?

2. Is plantar fasciitis treatable?

3. Are there certain types of people that plantar fasciitis affects more than others?
What is Plantar Fascia and What Causes Plantar Fasciitis?

The plantar fascia is a thick band of tissue that stretches between your heel bone and your toes. Your plantar fascia provides the base of support in your foot’s arch. It’s designed to be a shock absorber, of sorts, to support your weight as you walk, run, and carry yourself throughout the day. When too much stress (weight or pressure) is placed on the plantar fascia, it can cause microscopic tears in the tissue. These tears and overstretching of the plantar fascia can cause the tissue to become inflamed and even distorted. This inflammation is the condition we know as plantar fasciitis.

There are several factors that can cause or contribute to plantar fasciitis occurring, namely the following, among others:

1) Wearing shoes without the proper support, especially if you have abnormally high arches or flat feet
2) Being overweight or obese
3) Late-term pregnancy, specifically if you’re carrying more than 30 pounds over your pre-pregnancy weight
4) Tight Achilles tendons
5) Being constantly on your feet

While there may be similar symptoms between cases of plantar fasciitis, our Orthopedic Associates staff believes in customized treatment. Every patient’s condition, factors, and medical history are unique to their case, which is why we want to identify the exact cause for your condition of plantar fasciitis.
Arguably the most prevalent symptom of plantar fasciitis is a sharp, stabbing pain in the base of the heel region. On occasion, plantar fasciitis can present itself as a throbbing pain throughout the arch of the foot. It often affects only one foot, but there are times when both feet are affected.

Plantar fasciitis pain is often felt when you first get out of bed in the morning. You may also feel pain after sitting or lying down for a period of time. As mentioned earlier, each patient’s case is unique, which is why you may not experience certain ‘common’ symptoms as other patients might. However, you may still be suffering from plantar fasciitis with just one of these symptoms.

If your doctor suspects plantar fasciitis is affecting you, they will probably check your foot for tenderness. It’s important to confirm that you’re not suffering from any other foot condition that may be presenting as plantar fasciitis. Your doctor may ask you to flex your foot while they push on your plantar fascia to see if the pain or discomfort increases with pressure.

Mild swelling and a ‘redness’ of your plantar fascia may also be indicators of plantar fascia. In certain situations your doctor may order an X-Ray or MRI to confirm no other foot condition is causing the pain and discomfort. If you believe you may be suffering from plantar fasciitis, don’t wait to get the treatment you need. Plantar fasciitis is a condition that can further regress if left untreated. It’s better to be safe than sorry when it comes to diagnosing whatever condition may be affecting your feet.
The good news is approximately 90 percent of plantar fasciitis cases can be healed with conservative, in-home treatments. The key to treating heel pain is to reduce the inflammation throughout the plantar fascia. There are a number of home-based and nonsurgical medical treatments that are proven to be effective in treating plantar fasciitis.

Staying off your feet is one of the best treatments for plantar fasciitis. Applying a good ice compress to your injured foot for 15-20 minutes at a time several times throughout the day can be an excellent way to reduce swelling. Wearing an appropriate set of insoles or arch supports can also reduce pain and discomfort.

NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), such as aspirin, Naproxen, and ibuprofen can also reduce inflammation, as the name implies. In certain situations, home-based treatments may not be effective in treating your specific case of plantar fasciitis. Your doctor may choose to look at nonsurgical treatment options to treat your condition. A corticosteroid injection at the location of the damaged area can help with pain and inflammation.

Your doctor may also prescribe a regimen of physical therapy to stretch and support your plantar fascia. The goal of physical therapy is to relieve unnecessary tension in your plantar fascia, Achilles heel, and calf muscles. By strengthening the muscles connected throughout your lower legs, this can ease much of the tension throughout the sole of your foot.
As with all medical conditions, our Orthopedic Associates team aims to identify the most appropriate treatment possible. Nonsurgical treatments sometimes do not work in severe cases of plantar fasciitis. It’s in those instances where we explore and discuss possible surgical options to try reversing the damage done to your plantar fascia.

Our goal with any plantar fasciitis treatment is to preserve the overall health of your foot as much as possible. We believe in doing what’s necessary to help you enjoy the life you want to live and keep you on your feet. If you’re suffering from plantar fasciitis, your first step is to connect with one of our board-certified podiatrists at Orthopedic Associates. Start a conversation with our team today by calling (314) 569-0612 or scheduling your next appointment with Orthopedic Associates.

What if Nonsurgical Treatments Don’t Work?

