

Patient Information: Plantar Fasciopathy

What is Plantar Fasciopathy?

The plantar fascia is a thick band of fibrous tissue running from the heel to the ball of the foot, where it fans out to attach to each toe. Plantar fasciopathy is a painful condition affecting the sole of the foot; most commonly the heel. It is a condition that limits lifestyle and recovery can be speeded up by a few simple measures.

What causes Plantar Fasciopathy?

The exact cause is not known but many factors are thought to contribute to the problem: overuse (including sporting activity and occupations requiring standing/walking for a prolonged periods), alterations in the arches of the foot (flat-feet or high arched feet), recent weight gain or obesity, a tight calf muscle and Achilles tendon.

What are the symptoms?

Heel pain that occurs on rising from bed in the morning or on standing up after resting for a while is the hallmark of this condition. Mainly presents as pain around the heel and inside of your foot but can cause pain anywhere in the bottom of the foot. Pain is usually sharp and worse in the morning when you start walking after waking up. It is often worse after standing or walking for a long time. In some people it can be less severe and come on only with vigorous activity or exercise.

Who gets Plantar Fasciopathy?

1 in 100 people will suffer from this over their life time. It is more common in adults usually aged 40-60 but can occur at any age. Women get it more often than men. Factors that increase your chance of getting this condition include being overweight, pregnancy, occupations that keep you on your feet for a long time, overuse or sudden stretching activities such as in athletes, tight Achilles tendon, flat feet, high arches or abnormal walking pattern and wearing shoes with no support.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis can be made by your doctor or physiotherapist from careful questioning and an examination. Other tests such as X-rays, MRI or Ultra-sound scan are not required in the majority of cases.

How is it treated?

Plantar Fasciopathy is mainly treated non-surgically and can be done at home. Due to the type of tissue it will take a few months before the symptoms settle down. Over 90% of patients have relief of symptoms by 10 months.

Non- surgical treatments include:

1. Selective rest- avoid activities that stress the fascia (produce pain).

Patient Information: Plantar Fasciopathy

2. Ice – can be applied to the sole of the foot through a damp cloth for up to 20 minutes at a time or can be massaged into the area.
3. Stretching exercises (see below) are very important.
4. Orthotics- such as silicone heel cups, arch support and/or night splints.
5. Footwear- should support your feet and be well cushioned. Avoid walking barefoot.
6. Physiotherapy – many patients benefit from a course of treatment, advice and supervised exercise.
7. Anti-inflammatory medications.
8. Weight loss.

If these treatments are not effective and symptoms have been present for over one year, which is quite rare, steroid injection, shockwave therapy or surgery may be considered.

Exercises for Plantar Fasciopathy

Remember that whilst there is no quick fix for this condition, the exercises below will be of benefit if performed regularly and consistently over a number of months.

The most important times to stretch are before taking your first steps in the morning and when you have been sitting for a long time.

You cannot stretch too often.

Calf Stretch



Place your affected leg behind your unaffected leg with the knee straight and toes pointing forwards. Lean forwards against a wall, keeping your back leg straight and heel down. You should be aware of a strong pull in the calf muscle. Hold the position for 30 seconds and repeat 5 times. This is 1 set. You should do at least 3 of these sets per day.

Plantar fascia stretch



Cross your affected leg over the knee of your other leg. Pull back the toes of the affected foot back towards your shin. Place the thumb of the opposite hand over your plantar fascia to check for tension. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and repeat 5-10 times. This is 1 exercise set. You should do at least 3 of these sets per day.

Patient Information: Plantar Fasciopathy

Strengthening:

Place a rolled up towel under your toes and stand on the edge of a step. Slowly raise and lower up and down using your calf muscles. Perform the exercise slowly, pausing for a second at the top and bottom of the movement. Repeat as many times as possible until fatigued or pain becomes significant. Perform 3 sets.



If you can perform the exercise on the affected leg only, without too much pain, then this should be done.

Remember, mild pain is acceptable especially if it settles quickly after exercising.

What if I need to contact someone?

Fracture Clinic –

Tel: 0151 529 2554 (Monday – Friday)
Please leave a message on the answer machine stating your name and contact number and a member of staff will return your call.

Phil Ellison

Lower Limb ESP (Physiotherapist)
Therapies Dept.
Tel: 0151 529 3335 (Monday-Friday)



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

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