

Heel Pain and Plantar Fasciitis

What is plantar fasciitis?

A common type of heel and arch pain. The plantar fascia is a band of tissue that connects your heel bone to your toes and works like a rubber band to form the arch of your foot. A pad of fat in your heel covers the plantar fascia to help absorb the shock of walking. If the plantar fascia becomes irritated or swollen, heel pain can result.

What are the symptoms?

Your health care provider will ask you about the kind of pain you are having, when it occurs and how long you have had it. If you have pain in your heel when you stand up for the first time in the morning, you may have plantar fasciitis. Most people say the pain is like a knife or a pin sticking into the bottom of the foot. After standing for a while, the pain becomes more like a dull ache. If you sit down for any length of time, the sharp pain will come back when you stand up again.

Is there a test to confirm I have plantar fasciitis?

No. Your health care provider should be able to tell if you have it by learning more about your symptoms and doing an exam. Usually an x-ray or other tests are not required, unless your provider wants to check whether your symptoms are caused by something else.

What can I do to make my foot feel better?

Most people get better within a year, even if they do not get treated.

Rest: give your foot time to heal by resting, but don't completely stop being active, as this can lead to more pain and stiffness in the long term.

Ice: putting ice on your heel for 20 minutes up to four times per day might help to relieve pain. Icing and massaging your foot before exercise might also help.

Pain medication: ibuprofen and naproxen may help with pain, check with your health provider first.

Foot exercises: certain exercises can help to strengthen the muscles in your foot and stretch out tight tendons and ligaments. Ask your health care provider (towel/rubber band foot stretch; foot circles, toe curls, toe towel curls, tennis ball etc.). You may also be referred to a physiotherapist, podiatrist or chiropractor by your health provider. Visit the following for more online information:

- Alberta Health: <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/aftercareinformation/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=ad1503>
- Video that demonstrates at-home stretching exercises: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZmeJ7AP6jl>

Sturdy shoes and Night splints: running shoes with plenty of cushion and arch/heel support are best. Adding a padded or gel heel insert might help too. Some people find a splint used at night to keep their foot straight and to prevent the plantar fascia from getting tighter may also help. Consult with a qualified Canadian footcare professional (e.g., podiatrist or in some provinces a chiropractor) before purchasing any of these items to be sure you are not using something that might make your foot pain worse.

How is it treated?

After treating on your own (trying the above), if you do not get better or your symptoms become more severe, your health care provider might suggest:

- Referral to a qualified foot care professional for special shoe inserts, made to fit your foot
- Taping of your foot in a special way to help support it or splinting of the foot and ankle which can be done by either a qualified foot care professional or a physiotherapist
- Injections of steroid medications in your foot to help with pain
- Surgery (only in some cases that do not get better with other treatments).

Some newer treatments have not been well studied or have not been proven to work (e.g., laser, acupuncture).

Be sure to ask your health provider if you are considering trying something else to help relieve your pain.

How do I prevent Plantar Fasciitis from coming back?

- Wear shoes that fit well with plenty of cushioning and that support your heel and ankle.
- Avoid going barefoot, wearing slippers, flip-flops, flat or poorly fitted or worn-out shoes.

Adapted from: **1)** MedlinePlus <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007021.htm>; **2)** Family Doctor.org <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/plantar-fasciitis.printerview.all.html>; **3)** American Family Physician. 2011. <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2011/0915/p686.html>
4) UpToDate 2017. https://www.uptodate.com/contents/heel-pain-caused-by-plantar-fasciitis-the-basics?source=see_link

