

A GUIDE TO: **PLANTAR FASCIITIS**

ALSO KNOWN AS 'PLANTAR HEEL PAIN'

It's important to say at outset that this name for the condition is now being replaced by 'plantar heel pain'. 'Itis' refers to inflammation, but inflammation is rarely a factor.

Fascia (from the Latin 'band') is the unbroken piece of connective tissue that envelops all the muscles, tendons, bones and other tissue throughout our bodies. It is the nature of fascia to have a snug fit, shrinking and expanding with movement. Plantar fascia is simply the name given to the part of that fascia on the underside of the foot.

The plantar fascia plays an important role in energy transmission as we walk or run. It also provides arch support and shock absorption.

WHAT EXACTLY IS PLANTAR FASCIITIS?

Plantar fasciitis is the name given to damage to the fascia on the underside of the foot that connects the heel to the forefoot. It is thought to arise from small tears of the fascia. These tears do not get the opportunity to recover before the fascia is stressed again as you become more active after periods of rest.

FOR HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

It's a very stubborn condition and will unfortunately take time to recover. Symptoms can easily persist for 6 months or more, so it is essential to attack the problem early and be as proactive as you can be. It won't just go away.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Sharp pain in heel (like walking on Lego®!) when taking your first steps of the day or after periods of rest
- Pain that eases with walking but returns after the next long rest period
- Difficulty raising toes (because it raises the arch and therefore stretches the fascia)

SELF HELP

Remember this is a stubborn condition; perhaps because we never get the chance to not use our feet! Don't expect results overnight, but persist and you will rid yourself of the condition in the quickest possible time with help from the [tips on the next page...](#)



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CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

SPORTS ARE A FACTOR

It's an injury brought on by overuse (i.e. more load than the body can handle). Running, dancing and other sports involving repetitive action in ankle movement will make you more likely to suffer the problem.

HIGH FOOT ARCHES

High foot arches will create more of a stretch on the fascia, which may cause more irritation and damage.

COLLAPSED ARCHES

Collapsed arches can also create more of a stretch on the fascia, as the foot will roll-in more, causing more of a twisting force.

TIGHT CALF MUSCLES

Tight calf muscles can be a factor. The calf muscles facilitate movement at the ankle joint. Tight calves will restrict movement and thus place more strain on the fascia.

OCCUPATIONS

Occupations that involve standing or walking a lot at work seem to increase susceptibility. The feet are taking the weight of the body for long periods, exceeding the load capacity of the soft tissue (its the overuse factor again).

EXCESS WEIGHT

Excess weight means that more energy has to be absorbed by the tissue. This increases strain on the fascia.

FOOTWEAR SELECTION

Footwear selection is important. Shoes with no cushioning and flip flops can cause, or worsen, the condition. You may find that trainers with an air unit, or a gel heel for your flat shoes, will help.

BENEFITS OF MASSAGE

Deep tissue massage is of great benefit for plantar fasciitis. In addition to massage of the calf muscles, advanced 'muscle energy technique' stretches, borrowed from the field of osteopathy, will be used to increase range of movement at the ankle joint.

Additionally, massage to the plantar fascia itself will desensitise the area and provide pain relief. The effect of the massage will be to relieve pain in the arch of the foot and insertion point of the plantar fascia.

Bristol Massage Therapy would also take the time to discuss your exact circumstances, likely factors that have brought-on the condition and provide an exercise programme tailored to your needs.



ICE

Helps with pain reduction in its capacity to cause numbness. Apply ice for a maximum of 15 minutes at a time, with a 15 minute gap between applications. Make sure the ice is wrapped in a thin towel to avoid killing skin cells.



KINESIOLOGY TAPING

When providing a massage, Bristol Massage Company can show you how to apply this tape, which can help reduce pain.



WHAT ABOUT TRYING BAREFOOT SHOES?

As a general concept, there is always debate about the merits of barefoot running shoes, with no clear consensus. This is a big topic that would require a separate guide for a proper discussion. There are big pros and big cons to running barefoot.

Related to plantar heel pain specifically, it may be the case that running in cushioned, narrow running shoes (99% of the training shoe market) has overtime weakened our feet and made us more prone to this injury, amongst others. However, the time you have plantar heel pain would not be the time you should make such a dramatic change, as it would completely alter your foot mechanics and could easily bring on other aches and pains.

STRETCHES AND EXERCISES

ROLLING A SPIKY BALL

You can buy one of these balls for less than £5. Roll the ball firmly around the bottom of the foot, from the ball of the foot to the back of the foot's arch. Roll the ball for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other foot. This will give you a greater range of movement and ease the strain on the plantar fascia.



SELF-STRETCH OF PLANTAR FASCIA

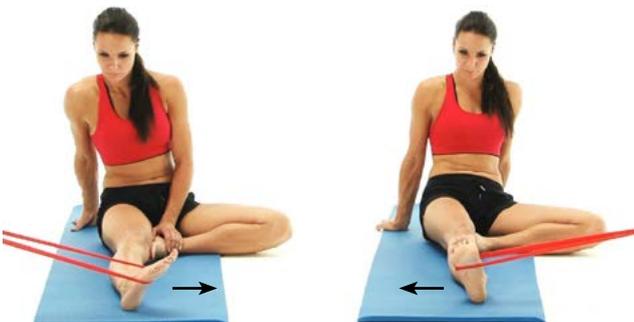
Ideally you would do this whilst still in bed. Why? Because the pain is caused by the small tears that occur when the fascia is stretched. That happens when you take the first steps after getting out of bed. If you prepare the body BEFORE the event that causes the damage, you may make a real difference.



ANKLE STRENGTHENING (OUTWARDS AND INWARDS) WITH A RESISTANCE BAND

Wrap one end of the band around the ball of the foot. Get someone to hold the other end, or tie it around a table leg.

Rotate the ankle inwards (x10), swivel around 180°, and rotate it outwards (10x). Repeat twice.



ECCENTRIC CALF CONTRACTION

An eccentric contraction is where the muscle fibres are lengthened during the contraction. Stand on a step, placing the ball of your foot on the edge of the step. Let the back of the foot drop slowly so that it finishes as far as possible below the ball of the foot. Raise and repeat to the point of fatigue and repeat several times throughout the day.



AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO FINISH!

Please do not stop doing these stretches and exercises once you have successfully gotten rid of plantar heel pain. If you want to make sure you don't suffer the condition again, you need to keep completing them as a part of your regular fitness routine.

