

FOOTPRINTS

AN INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER FOR PATIENTS OF APMA MEMBER PODIATRISTS

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PLANTAR FASCIITIS

PLANTAR FASCIITIS is a common foot malady, and treatment options run the gamut from conservative care to surgery in some cases.

SO WHAT IS PLANTAR FASCIITIS AND WHAT ARE ITS TELLTALE SYMPTOMS?

Your podiatrist may start by explaining the basic definition of the term. “Plantar” refers to the bottom surface of your foot, while the “fascia” is a band of connective tissue. Hence, those who suffer from plantar fasciitis have an inflammation of the connective tissue from the heel to the ball of the foot. The soft tissue of the plantar fascia can stretch, or even tear, causing pain that some describe as feeling as if their feet were on fire.

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES PLANTAR FASCIITIS FROM OTHER HEEL PAIN?

According to Grace Torres-Hodges, DPM, a podiatrist and spokesperson for the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), it lies in the anatomy of the heel.

“Although the symptoms may be the same with other heel pain, the thing I always emphasize is what structure is actually injured or inflamed,” Dr. Torres-Hodges said.

CONDITIONS SIMILAR TO PLANTAR FASCIITIS MAY INCLUDE:

→ **ACHILLES TENDONITIS:** Repetitive stress to the large tendon that runs down the back of your ankle to your heel may result in pain that mimics plantar fasciitis.

- **FLATFOOT:** Trauma, deterioration over time, inflammation of tendons, or muscle dysfunction can result in a loss of support for the arch of the foot. It’s correctable, but permanent damage may result if not treated in a timely manner.
- **TARSAL TUNNEL SYNDROME:** Compression of a nerve can lead to a tingling or burning sensation in the ankle or even in the arch of the foot.

BOTTOM LINE: See a podiatrist to identify the specific cause of your heel pain.

Once an APMA member podiatrist diagnoses a patient with plantar fasciitis, he or she will work with you to develop a treatment plan based on your individual needs. The list of treatment options is long and could include orthotics, stretching exercises, or surgery, depending on the severity.

According to APMA spokesperson Alan Bass, DPM, patients shouldn’t expect to recover overnight when using custom orthotics.

“Remember, we are changing the way you are walking,” Bass says. “You have walked a certain way your entire life and now we are changing that. There needs to be a period of adjustment.”



Alan Bass, DPM, is in private practice at Central Jersey Foot and Ankle Care, PC, in Manalapan, NJ. All quotes and content were used with his permission.



Grace Torres-Hodges, DPM, is owner of Torres Hodges Podiatry, a private, physician-owned, independent medical practice in Pensacola, FL. All quotes and content were used with her permission.

DR. BASS RECOMMENDS A FEW EXERCISES IF YOU EXPERIENCE HEEL PAIN CAUSED BY PLANTAR FASCIITIS, INCLUDING:



Picking up a towel with your toes for 10 seconds, while standing upright. Do this for two-to-three minutes at a time. Repeat up to three times per day.



Rolling a small frozen water bottle along the bottom of the foot for 20 minutes. The cold temperature helps decrease inflammation. Repeat up to three times daily.



Performing a heel cord stretch. Sitting on a chair or on the ground, hold your leg straight in front of you. Looping a towel or belt around the ball of your foot, hold the ends with one hand. After slightly bending your knee, steadily pull the towel or belt toward you, which will stretch your calf muscles. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat the motion 10 times. You may do this set up to three times per day.



Stretching the Achilles tendon. Face the wall, standing about an arm's length away. Place the non-affected foot in front of you and the affected foot behind you. Keeping both feet flat on the floor, lean in toward the wall and stretch out your calf. Hold for 30 seconds and then relax, repeating 10 times. Repeat this exercise up to three times per day.

Patients are reminded that foot pain is never normal. If you experience pain or discomfort in your foot or ankle, make an appointment with your podiatrist. Visit APMA.org for more info about conditions of the foot and ankle.