

# Don't be a Heel. Take Appropriate Steps.

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The plantar fascia is a ligament band running from your heel to the ball of your foot. This band pulls on the heel bone, raising the arch of your foot as it pushes off the ground. But if your foot moves incorrectly, the plantar fascia may become strained and painful. The fascia may swell and its tiny fibers may begin to fray, causing Plantar fasciitis (say "PLAN-tar fash-ee-EYE-tus"). It is the most common orthopedic complaint related to the foot and is most often caused by poor foot mechanics. If your foot flattens too much, the fascia may overstretch and swell. If your foot flattens too little, the fascia may ache from being pulled too tight.



That is more likely to happen if:

- Your feet roll inward too much when you walk
- You have high arches or flat feet.
- You walk, stand, or run for long periods of time, especially on hard surfaces.
- You are overweight.
- You wear shoes that don't fit well or are worn out, with poor arch support.
- You have tight calf muscles.

The most common symptom of plantar fasciitis is pain in the heel and arch area with the first step in the morning or after sitting for a long period of time. Pain may lessen after a few steps, but it comes back after rest or with prolonged movement such as walking and standing. Examination by a health care practitioner will also find tenderness to the touch of the bottom of the foot primarily around the heel area and tightness and inflammation of the arch of the foot and the heel cord.

Ignoring plantar fasciitis may result in chronic heel pain that hinders regular activities. It may result in the development of foot, knee, hip or back problems because of the way the pain of plantar fasciitis changes walking patterns.

Effective treatment would include anti-inflammatory medication as recommended by your doctor, heel cord stretching exercises being careful not to stretch the plantar fascia, and deep massage and applying ice at least twice daily for 15 minutes, rolling the foot over a frozen bottle of water can accomplish both. Wearing shoes with good motion control and an arch support and initially, decreased standing, walking, and high impact activities like running and Zumba, is recommended. Taking up a no or low impact exercise program for awhile is a good idea to give the plantar fascia a rest and allow the maintenance of a healthy weight, which in the long run, minimizes the stress on the arch, as well.



I am a proponent of using a night splint during the acute phase of the injury, wearing orthotics to give the arch rest and support to relief symptoms and prevent a reoccurrence, and doing corrective exercises to rectify any muscular and gait imbalances. On occasion a steroid injection may be warranted. However, it is wise to treat conservatively and be patient as symptom relief can take several months.