

Plantar fasciitis (heel pain)

Summer is here and one of the most common complaints for this time of the year is heel or foot pain.

This is known as 'plantar fasciitis' and is pain felt directly under the heel, especially first thing in the morning or after a period of rest. This can be very frustrating and debilitating as it limits the amount of exercise and walking you are able to do.

The plantar fascia is a sling of connective tissue which runs from your heel to the base of your toes underneath your foot. Its job is to hold up the arch of your foot. In the summer time when we all tend to walk around in either bare feet or jandals, the arch of our foot drops down and flattens. This places a lot of pressure down on to the plantar fascia causing it to flatten. When this happens repetitively it can cause micro tears and inflammation to occur at the insertion of the fascia at your heel.

If you sit with your feet out in front of you, you can see that you have a nice high arch in your foot, when you stand this flattens due to your body weight and gravity. It is normal for the arch to flatten slightly, but when this happens excessively problems can start. Usually our shoes help to support the arch, but in summer when we all wear unsupportive jandals or bare feet the arch flattens therefore causing inflammation and heel pain.

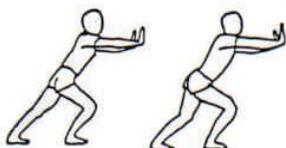
The pain is worse after a rest or sleeping as the fascia has been resting in a shortened position, the first few steps you take on standing cause this to stretch, causing the pain. As you continue to walk the fascia lengthens and therefore the pain eases.

So what can you do to prevent this?

One major step is to wear support shoes and sandals which support your arch and limit the amount of flattening. You may need to invest in a good pair of shoe inserts to support you arch which are available at all Active Living Physiotherapy Clinics.

If you know you are going for a long walk, put on your trainers not jandals.

Stretching you calf muscles and plantar fascia helps to keep the tissue lengthened.



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Strengthening the intrinsic muscles of your feet also helps to hold the arch up, do this by scrunching up a towel with your toes.



Massage the ball of your foot by rolling a frozen bottle of water under your foot.

If you start to develop heel pain see your physiotherapist immediately don't wait until the pain is severe, this means the pain will take longer to ease than if you had started treatment straight away.