

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Plantar Fasciitis (Sore Heel!)

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Do you have stabbing pain in the heel, especially in the morning? You may be the unlucky person who heel pain has landed on. Often it seems like it came out of nowhere. All of a sudden its got you.

O.K. What is it?

A very strong band of tissue that supports the arch of the foot becomes irritated and inflamed where it attaches to the heel bone.

Why pain in the AM or after sitting for awhile?

The tissue (plantar fascia) tends to tighten when it rests as your foot relaxes and points down.

Onset of pain

Two ways. You can seem to literally wake up with it one day. In other people it can come on gradually. Mild pain starts in the heel, which people refer to as a stone bruise.

Who gets it?

- More likely to have it if you are female
- Walking or standing on hard surfaces all day
- Excessive weight
- Runners with tight calf muscles
- People with abnormal arches, high or low

If you are a male who sits all day, weighs 150 lbs., has a normal arch and doesn't run - stop reading. You'll be O.K.

"Just wait, It will go away"

Bad advice from your Mom. If you don't treat it, it may become chronic. Big ouch! You may not be able to keep up your level of activity. You also may develop symptoms of foot, knee, hip, or back problems because it changes how you walk.

But what caused my sore heel?

Your plantar fascia tissue is designed to absorb huge stresses and strains. Sometimes too much pressure damages the tissue as it attaches to the heel bone. It's not very scientific, but that is what we know.

What else could it be?

Possibly arthritis in your foot or even a stress fracture. Other types of tendinitis could be present.

Can heel spurs cause it?

Heel spurs are mysterious. People with a sore heel may have a heel spur. But not always. Lots of people with really big heel spurs have no foot pain. People with no spur on x-ray can have bad heel pain. Makes no sense, but it's true.

Treatment

- Good supportive shoes like athletic shoes are fine
- Soft rubber heel cushions
- Advil or similar non steroidal
- Ice applied to the heel 3 times a day for 20 minutes
- Stretch the arch of your foot and your heel cord. Best way is to have a session with a physical therapist to learn specific exercises.
- Night splint. Something I might prescribe to help ease morning heel pain.
- Injection of cortisone anti-inflammatory medication

Anything else?

- Custom foot orthotics or inserts for your shoes to correct foot position or remove pressure from various places on your foot.
- Casting for a short time
- Walking boot. A removable walking boot can help in some cases.
- Surgery. Not very often. I've saved it until last. 98% of patients get better without surgery.

Fortunately, about 90% of patients will improve after 2 - 3 months of initial treatment. I see patients with sore heels fairly often in the office. It's a common problem, but there is hope with proper treatment.

Check out our office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection for more information about all the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal conditions I treat in the office and hospital.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush