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Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

## Plantar Fasciitis Advice

Plantar fasciitis is the inflammation of the strong band of tissue that stretches from your heel to your toes. It supports the arch of your foot and also acts as a shock-absorber in your foot. It can cause pain under your heel, but it usually goes in time. Treatment including rest, good footwear, insoles (orthoses), painkillers and stretching exercises may speed up recovery.

### What causes plantar fasciitis?

Repeated small injuries to the fascia (with or without inflammation) are thought to be the cause and the injury is usually near to where the plantar fascia attaches to your heel bone. You are more likely to injure your plantar fascia in certain situations. For example:

- If you are on your feet for a lot of the time e.g. walking, standing, running.
- If you have recently started exercising on a different surface
- If you have been wearing shoes with poor cushioning
- If you are overweight – this will put extra strain on your heel
- If there is an overuse or stretching of your sole e.g. athletes who increase running intensity or distances
- If you have a tight Achilles tendon. This can affect your ability to flex your ankle.

### How common is plantar fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis is a common condition, especially in the people aged 40 – 60 years. Prevalence estimates range from 4 – 7% in the general and older population respectively. It occurs in 8 – 10% of regular runners.

**If you are at all concerned about your injury, please contact the relevant  
Emergency Department: Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287**

**Or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**

**Nevil Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**

**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

## What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis?

Pain is the main symptom. This can be anywhere on the underside of the heel. However commonly, one spot is found as the main source of pain and this is often about 4 cm forward from your heel and may be tender to touch.

The pain is often worse when you take your first steps on getting up in the morning, or after long periods of rest where no weight is placed on your foot. You might find the pain feels better during exercise, but returns after resting and that it is difficult to raise your toes off the floor.

The following advice should help you to recover.

Things you should do:	Things you shouldn't do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ease off your sport</li><li>• Put an ice pack or bag of frozen peas in a damp towel on the painful area for up to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours</li><li>• Wear wide comfortable shoes with low cushioned heels, soft sole and good arch support</li><li>• Use soft insoles or heel pads in your shoes</li><li>• Do regular gentle stretching exercises</li><li>• Do exercises that do not put pressure on your feet, such as swimming</li><li>• Take pain relief regularly</li><li>• Try not to walk barefoot on hard surfaces</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use ice packs:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li><li>○ if you have poor sensation to cold</li><li>○ If you know you have poor circulation</li></ul></li><li>• Place ice packs directly onto your skin as they can burn.</li><li>• Do not leave ice on while asleep</li><li>• Walk or stand still for long periods</li><li>• Wear high heels or tight pointy shoes,</li><li>• Wear flip-flops or backless slippers</li></ul>

You can ask a pharmacist about the best painkiller to take.

See your GP if:

- the pain is severe or is getting worse
- You start to have tingling or loss of feeling in your foot
- You have diabetes – foot problems can be more serious if you have diabetes

## What Exercises can I do?

Complete rest is not advisable but it is important that you prevent putting the plantar fascia under strain in the early stages of healing.

Before you get out of bed in the morning, and then periodically throughout the day, do the following exercises to increase flexibility and ease pain. Begin them as soon as you can - they may cause discomfort but this shouldn't be severe or last very long. Start by doing 5 repetitions of each exercise, 3 times a day. Add an extra 1 or 2 repetitions every few days as long as you feel comfortable. The repetitions and sets are a guideline.

1. Sit on a chair. Lay the ankle of the leg you are going to stretch on top of the opposite knee. Bend your big toe upwards while you feel with the other hand on the heel and under foot. Hold the position about 30 seconds.



2. Put a ball on the floor and place foot on it. Apply a firm pressure to the ball. Roll forwards and backwards, and from side to side to decrease tensions.



3. Start by taking your shoes off. Sit on your knees while keeping the underside of your toes on the floor. When you feel the soles of your feet stretch, hold the position for about 30 seconds.



4. Sit with one leg stretched out. Fasten a rope or a rubber-band around the upper part of the foot. Try to relax your leg muscles while pulling the rope toward your body, creating a stretch on the backside of your calf. Hold for 30 seconds



5. Stand inclined facing a wall with good leg bent and the sore leg stretched in extension of your body. Keep your heel on the floor and push your hip forward until you feel a stretch in your calf. Hold for 30 seconds.



6. Stand on sore leg, with both hands on the wall. Bend your knee slightly and push your hip forward and down while keeping your heel on the floor. When you feel a stretch in the back of your lower leg, hold the position for 30 seconds.



### What should I take for Pain?

Painkillers, such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then. They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol. **With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** (like **Ibuprofen**) can also be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them. Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either. You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

**If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP for advice on pain control or self-refer to physiotherapy using the link below.**

Physio referral: [Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Physiotherapy Service](https://www.wales.nhs.uk)  
([wales.nhs.uk](https://www.wales.nhs.uk))



If you are unable to do this electronically you should call 0300 3732539 between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

**References:** Plantar fasciitis - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)) Plantar fasciitis | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE  
Heel pain causes & treatments - Illnesses & conditions | NHS inform

**This document is available in Welsh/  
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**