

Plantar Fasciitis (Heel Spurs)

General Information

Although some experts distinguish between the terms plantar fasciitis and heel spurs, others do not, and the distinction is difficult to make, especially for a non-specialist. We will use the terms interchangeably.

The plantar fascia is a fibrous band of tissue that connects the heel bone to the ball of the foot and the toes, and thus supports the arch of the foot. Like the string of a bow, the tension on the fascia can be very great. Pain in your heel or arch could be a result of too much tension, causing inflammation of the fascia (plantar fasciitis). Chronic plantar fasciitis can cause the development of bony growths where the plantar fascia meets the heel bone (heel spurs). Heel spurs and plantar fasciitis can in turn irritate nerves in the heel area and cause even more pain.

Causes of Plantar Fasciitis (Heel Spurs)?

Plantar fasciitis and heel spurs are caused by chronically overstressing the fascia. Overstressing can occur in several ways, and there are several contributing factors as well. Overstressing can be chronic and develop over a long period of time, or it can develop more quickly, as a result of a sudden increase in activity.

People spending too much time on their feet, especially on hard surfaces, can overstress the fascia. This would apply to certain occupational groups such as teachers or department store clerks. Certain sports (excessive running, basketball, and aerobics, especially stair-stepping) can also, over time, put undue strain on the plantar fascia.

A sudden increase in activity, as in lunging after shots in a game of racquetball after a long period of inaction or attempting to push one's car off the road after running out of gas can also overstress the fascia. This is especially true if some of the contributing factors, to be discussed below, are present.

X-rays of the heel may reveal a bony spur but frequently they are not associated with pain and need not be treated.

Contributing Factors include:

- Overweight or sudden increase in weight. The heavier a person is, the more stress is placed on the fascia.
- Age. As we age, the fascia loses elasticity. One source suggests that 90% of people with plantar fasciitis (heel spurs) are more than 30 years old.
- Weight-bearing activities (standing for long periods of time, jogging, lifting heavy weights)
- Poor shoes. Worn-out shoes, shoes with poor arch support or cushioning or that are too stiff

- Inflexible calf muscles
- Weak foot muscles
- Flat feet; over-pronation of the feet

Symptoms of Plantar Fasciitis (Heel Spurs)?

Recurring heel pain is the primary symptom, particularly after sleep or rest, occurring in the first few steps and then getting better. There are other causes of heel pain (see **Posterior Heel Pain**), but plantar fasciitis is the most common cause. If you experience heel pain with the first few steps you take in the morning, then plantar fasciitis is a likely explanation.

Treatment

Contributing factors of this condition suggest several treatments. These include:

- Losing weight
- Wearing proper shoes, including arch support, cushioning, and raised heels
- Changing one's occupation or modifying other activities
- Calf-stretching exercises
- Anti-inflammatory medication, such as aspirin or ibuprofen

It may take six months or longer for the fascia to return to normal. Some authorities consider it to be extremely important to begin treatment as soon as possible after experiencing symptoms.

Special Instructions: