



What is heel pain?

Heel pain, or plantar fasciitis, is an extremely common, though not serious, condition.

The *plantar fascia* is a strap-like structure on the bottom of the foot. The *plantar fascia* runs the length of the arch, from the heel bone to the toes (illustration at lower left).

The fascia is not very stretchable—and that's where your heel problems can begin. Any movement that repeatedly puts too much stretch on the arch and on the *plantar fascia* can cause the fascia to tear or pull away from the heel bone. In time, it hurts—a lot.

Usually the symptoms begin very gradually, but after several weeks the pain gets worse and doesn't go away. Generally there is no swelling or bruising in the area. However, there is some tenderness when deep pressure is applied to the heel pad.

Anyone can have heel pain. You may have plantar fasciitis if your pain fits the two telltale signs:

- pain concentrated just in front of the heel pad
- pain worse in the morning on arising or after a long rest

This pain can last for several weeks or even several months. Usually the condition will go away on its own, but because it can take several months, you may want to do something to feel better now.



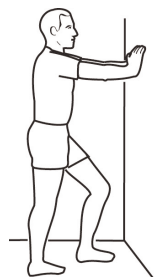
What can cause heel pain?

- non supportive shoes
- flat (pronated) feet
- high-arched (cavus), rigid feet
- sudden increase in activity level
- standing on hard floors for a long time
- obesity

What can you do?

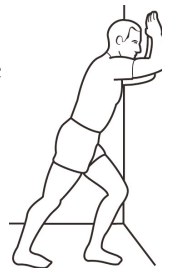
- Give your foot a rest for 2 to 6 weeks. Do less standing, walking, or running.
- Try exercise that does not stretch your arch. Swimming or biking are excellent.
- Buy nonprescription arch supports. Arch supports can often be found at shoe repair shops, sporting goods stores, and drug stores.
- Massage the painful area with ice.
- Wear shoes with good arch support and heel support.
- Stretch your Achilles tendon:

1. Stand at arms' length from a wall or counter with your back knee locked straight and your front knee bent.



2. Your toes should point in slightly.

3. Slowly lean forward until a moderate stretch is felt on the calf muscle of your straight leg.



4. Hold that moderate stretch for 20 seconds, keeping your feet and heels flat on the floor. Do not bounce.

5. Repeat 1 to 4 times with the other leg.

6. Repeat the exercise for both legs at least five times per session—two or three sessions per day.

- **Do not** walk barefoot. Try wearing running shoes or “pro” walking shoes. For women, shoes with a small heel (1 to 1½ inches) can also help take some stress off the *plantar fascia* and provide relief for this condition. For both men and women, shoes with a thicker sole are recommended.
- **Do not** apply heat.

When should you see a doctor?

- If your foot doesn't feel better in a month or two, it's time to visit your medical professional.
- If you think you have ongoing heel pain, you should make a medical appointment. After the examination, you may be referred to a specialist.

What can the doctor do?

Your medical care might include:

- cortisone injections
- oral medications (anti-inflammatory)
- custom orthotic inserts: Custom orthotics are tried only after over-the-counter supports don't work.
- surgery: Surgery should truly be a last resort because there are so many ways to treat this condition without surgery.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.