

FOCUS ON YOUR FEET

Pain Can be a Warning Signal

We all know what it's like to have sore feet. Maybe we feel it after a day of shopping at the malls. But when you start to have pain in your feet on a regular basis, even when you are just standing, then it's time to take a closer look at what's wrong.

The soles of our feet have two jobs: to be a shock absorber for the foot bones and to limit how far our arch flattens when we walk or stand.

Being overweight, having poor foot posture, a series of little injuries that aren't treated, overuse - any or all of these factors can cause the kind of foot pain that we call "plantar fasciitis" (plan-tar-fash-i-tis). This can range from a feeling that you're walking on cotton balls to severe burning and pain.

The pain is caused by swelling in the muscles and ligaments where they attach to the bones of the arch. The tissue swells because it's stressed by an arch that flattens out too much.

The more damaged the tissues are, the weaker they get. They become less able to handle the ongoing stress of poor foot posture, being overweight, overusing the foot, or accumulated injuries. And the more stressed they are, the more painful you'll feel.

Many people try to cope by changing how they walk, finding ways to position the foot to avoid the painful area.

This is a short term solution because when we change how we stand and/or walk, it affects the rest of the body. Pain that began in the foot can start to cause pain in the ankles, knees, hips or spine.

Treatment

At Health Motion, our primary goal is to interrupt the cycle of pain and limited function. For this type of foot pain, we begin with hard friction massage on the sole, followed by stretching the tissue, using a cone or a tennis ball.

Ultrasound helps to weaken the scar tissue and resolve

the swelling. Electrical stimulation works both directly on the area to improve circulation, and indirectly restore neural pathways.

At home follow-up includes taking contrast baths, alternating cold and hot water soaks for 10 minutes. You'll learn a series of exercises that will help improve the elasticity of the tissue and if you follow the full treatment course, you may be pain free in a week or two.

If you've had the problem for a long time and you have a small bone spur, 5-6 treatments will resolve the pain.

Problems caused by larger bone spurs take longer to resolve, and you'll have a different course of treatment, including exercises intended to reduce strain around the spur.

If the spur is very large, your only option may be surgery to remove it. While surgery can often improve conditions radically, it has risk too. Because it cuts through tissue, it causes scarring, which in turn, can limit function.

Resolving the Cause

Poor foot posture can be improved by combining active work (exercises to strengthen and restore muscle balance) and passive aids, like shoe inserts or heels. These can also help with problems of overuse, because as you gain strength and muscle balance, your feet will not be injured as easily.

If you are overweight, we can help you set realistic goals and provide you with instruction for exercises to gradually reduce weight and improve overall muscle tone and balance.

If your plantar fasciitis has caused additional problems in other joints, we can address those as well, using a combination of therapies, exercise and education to improve your posture and how you use your joints.

So, it's your move. Are you tired of living with sore feet? Come in for a free screen and let's identify the problem!

- Rob Collewijn, PT, Founder of Health Motion



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