# Plantar Fascia Pain
# Advice and Exercise Leaflet

## What is Plantar Fasciitis?

The Plantar fascia is a band of collagen tissue that connects between your heel and your toes, supporting the arch of your foot. Just like a joint, the Plantar Fascia is also subject to becoming irritated, this is known as Plantar Fasciitis.

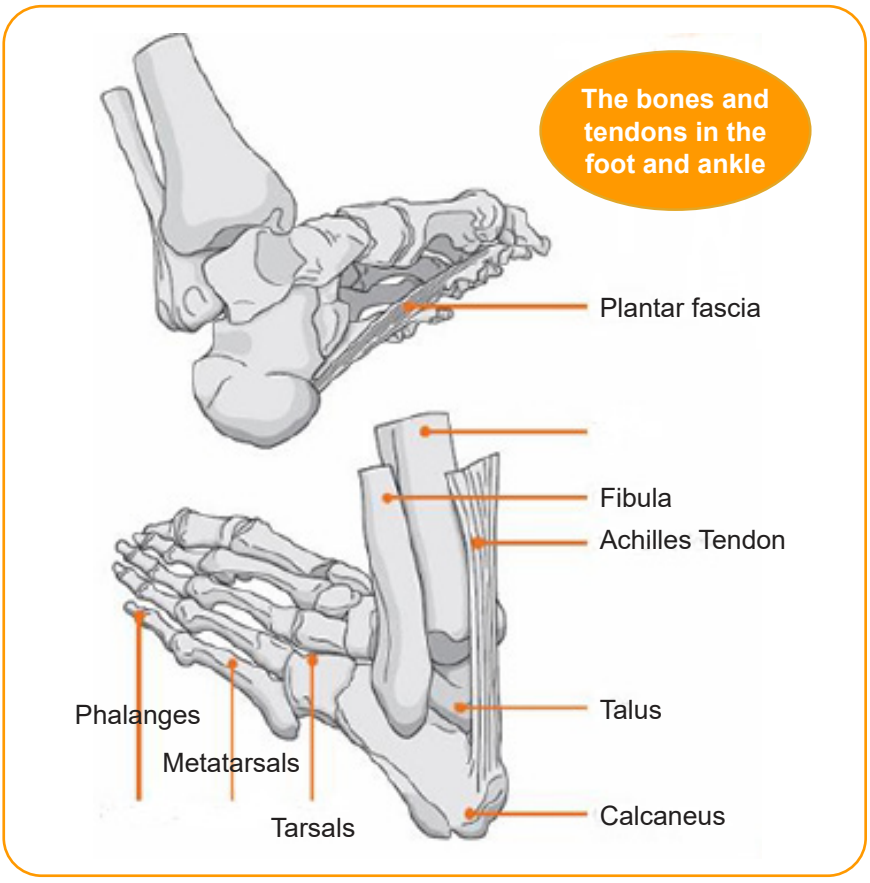



Image provided by Arthritis research UK

## What are the Symptoms of Plantar Fasciitis?

- People usually complain of pain under the heel.
- Pain is present when weight-bearing such as walking, standing or running.
- Pain is worst first thing in the morning or on getting up after sitting for prolonged periods. This is because when our feet are at rest the plantar fascia contracts and shortens, when we move the plantar fascia is suddenly stretched causing pain.
- Symptoms normally starts gradually but can be caused after a sudden stretch and sometimes for no known reason.

## What causes Plantar Fasciitis?

Anything that places increased load or stress on the Plantar Fascia can cause it to become symptomatic.

### There are a number of causes, which include the following:

- Poor ankle/foot mechanics; flat footedness.
- Change in footwear.
- Poor conditioning; weakness and/or tightness of the leg muscles.
- Overuse injury, such as repetitive uphill running.
- Sudden increase in training.

## What can you do to help relieve symptoms?

**Rest the Plantar Fascia** - Reduce the amount of running/walking you do.

**Gel Heel Inserts** can be bought which provide some cushioning around the painful area.

**Footwear** - Trainers or similar shoes often give most relief as they are shock-absorbing and have an arch support. Avoid walking around in bare feet in the house particularly first thing in the morning when pain is at its worst.

**Ice Bottle Rolling** - Place a water bottle in the freezer. Use to roll under foot for 10-15 minutes to help reduce any inflammation and soreness.

**CAUTION - direct contact of ice on the skin can cause burns**

It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the item immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.

**Medications** can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice.

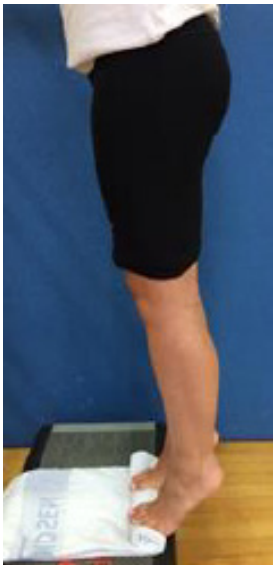
**Gentle Ankle Movement** - When we are not moving our ankle the fascia can stiffen. Before getting out of bed in the morning or if sat for longer than 20-30 minutes it is important to move your ankle up and down to gradually loosen and warm-up your fascia.

## Exercise Programme

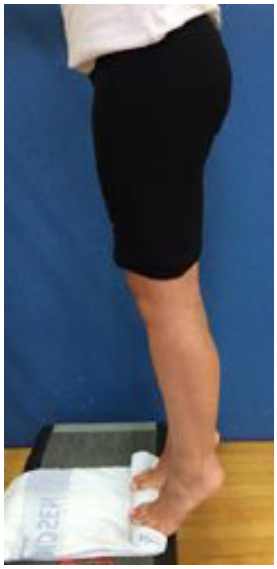
**Strengthening Exercises** - These are to be completed **every other day.**

### Level 1

a.



b.



1. Stand with toes on a small rolled up towel on and heels over the edge of a step (a)
2. Hold onto support for balance
3. Rise up onto the toes in 5 seconds
4. Hold for 3 seconds
5. Slowly lower in 5 seconds

**Complete 15 repetitions x 3 sets with knee straight (small rest between sets)**

6. Then repeat 15 x 3 with knee slightly bent (b)

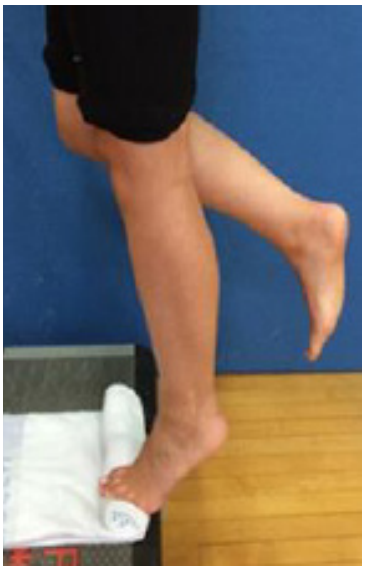
**Take care not to lose your balance**
**Once you can complete these exercises pain free move onto Level 2.**

### Level 2

To progress the exercises we need to increase the load.

To do this you complete the above exercises on one leg at a time.

a.



b.

### Level 3

When the exercises become pain free, perform the exercises with weights. You can add some weight to a rucksack to wear whilst doing the exercises. It is important to continue to build up the weight gradually.

## Stretches

It is important to do specific exercises to stretch and gradually strengthen the fascia.
The following exercises need to be performed daily as tolerated for 12 weeks.

## Ball Massage

In sitting roll a tennis ball under your foot for a few minutes each day. This helps to relax the fascia and reduced pain.

## Foam Roller

Foam rollers can be used to relax the calf muscle that can add tension to the Plantar Fascia.

Rest calf over foam roller. Bend one leg up and push up through your arms and leg then roll forwards and backwards. You should feel deep pressure along your calf. It is normal for this to feel very uncomfortable. (a)

**a.**

To increase the pressure cross your pain-free leg over your painful leg, push up through your arms and roll backwards and forwards. (b)

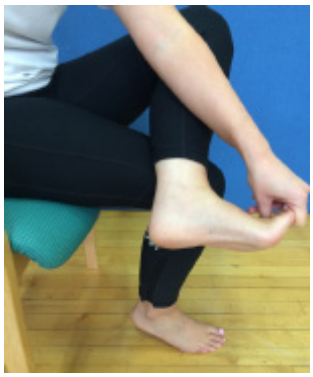
**b.**

Roll your calf up and down for a few minutes every day.

## Stretch

Sitting with painful heel crossed over the other leg.
Pull toes upwards until you feel a stretch under your foot

Hold for 20 seconds, repeat 3 times in a row,
3 times a day.



Stand with toes of affected side up against wall.
Keep your heel down and try to move your knee forward to touch the wall.

Hold for 20 seconds, repeat 3 times in a row,
3 times a day

Important Information when completing your strengthening exercises

Some discomfort with the exercises is ok but if your pain is aggravated later that day or the following morning post completing your exercises this is a sign that you need to reduce the load or repetitions.

Only progress onto the next level of exercises when you can complete full sets with no pain. It may take several weeks to progress to the next level.

Continue to complete the exercises for 12 weeks even if your pain has resolved.

As symptoms reduce you can gradually return to activity.

Stop the exercises if they increase your pain. If you are struggling with these exercises please seek guidance from a qualified physiotherapist.

## Summary

Plantar Fasciitis can take some months to settle down.  It is important to complete these exercises to stretch and strengthen the Plantar Fascia.

If your symptoms do not settle within 3 months of following the above steps you may benefit from a review with a physiotherapist.

**Web Address:** http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/

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Physiotherapy Department
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Telephone: 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office: 01484 905380

www.cht.nhs.uk

## If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

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