

## **Heel pain- advice on self-care**

Please take time to read this leaflet and the stretching exercises enclosed and follow the advice and guidance provided.

A high percentage of patients are able to manage heel pain very effectively with the use of arch supports and stretching exercises.

### **What causes heel pain?**

There are several causes of heel pain but perhaps the most common is Plantar Fasciitis (pronounced Plan-tar-fashee-eye-tis).

The plantar fascia is a broad thick band of tissue that runs from under the heel to the ball of the foot. In certain individuals the plantar fascia can become over-stretched, resulting in pain around its attachment at the heel and into the arch of the foot.

The following are common factors often associated with Plantar fasciitis:

- A change in activities
- Feet which roll inwards
- Walking or standing for long periods
- Being overweight
- Very tight calf muscles
- Footwear which doesn't provide adequate arch support
- Sporting activities such as running
- A sudden injury

## What are the signs and symptoms?

- Pain, usually under the centre or inside of the heel, often radiating into the arch of the foot.
- The pain is generally worse first thing in the morning as the Plantar Fascia tightens up over night. This generally eases off with activity.
- As the condition becomes more severe the pain can increase throughout the day if activity continues.
- Pressing or stretching the Plantar Fascia may be painful.
- Occasionally the outside of the heel may become painful. This is caused by walking on the outside of the heel to avoid the pain.
- Similarly pains may occur in the other foot or elsewhere, in the knee or back due to altered gait.

## Will the pain go on its own?

Sometimes the pain will settle after a while as activities which bring on the pain are reduced. However, Plantar Fasciitis can frequently become chronic if left untreated and may last for several years. Help should always be sought if the pain persists as treatment is often simple and effective.

## What can I do for my pain?

- **Modify your activity:** avoid activities which bring on the pain wherever possible. For example prolonger weight bearing activity such as running on a treadmill.

- **Arch supports/Orthotics:** a well shaped arch support is often extremely effective at reducing the over stretching of the Plantar Fascia. They should be work for at least 8 hours a day and are most effective when worn inside good supportive shoes. Suitable arch supports, such as Orthoheel are commercially available from Boots and other outlets.
- **Stretching exercises:** Controlled stretching of the calf muscles and the plantar fascia before getting out of bed and a few times each day is well known to help many patient. (See stretches leaflet.)
- **Massage:** although it can be uncomfortable at first, firm massage of the Plantar Fascia with your thumb can improve levels of comfort. Pull the big toe back to tension the Fascia and to help stretch it. (see stretches leaflet.)
- **Change footwear:** spend more of your daily activity in good supportive shoes such as trainers. Avoid flimsy slip-on shoes.
- **Taping:** athletic tape can be purchased at most pharmacies. When applied to the arch of the foot in strips it can help rest and support the Plantar Fascia.
- **Weight control:** if you are overweight, losing body weight will reduce the amount of stress your feet have to cope with.
- **Anti-inflammatories and analgesics:** pain can sometimes be eased with use of medication such as Ibuprofen or Paracetamol. However you should discuss this with your doctor first as some people are unable to tolerate this sort of medication.

## **What if the pain persists?**

The treatment outlined in this leaflet normally takes time to have an effect so you need to persevere for at least 6-8 weeks. However, if after this time there is no sign of any improvement you will need to seek help from your HCPC registered Podiatrist.

## **Useful links:**

[www.heelfitkit.com](http://www.heelfitkit.com)

[www.healthy-footwear-guide.com](http://www.healthy-footwear-guide.com)

[www.heelspurs.com](http://www.heelspurs.com)

[www.pediroller.co.uk](http://www.pediroller.co.uk)

[www.heel-that-pain.com](http://www.heel-that-pain.com)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)