



Relief For Painful Heels

A pain in the heel can be as bad as the fabled “pain in the neck” - and can slow you down even more. Runners and other athletes often get painful heels, but it can happen to anybody. If the pain originates in the plantar fascia, which is the thick connective tissue under the skin on the bottom of your foot and the sides of the heel, then the condition is called plantar fasciitis. The plantar fascia, which acts as a kind of bowstring for the arch of the foot, can develop small, painful tears under repeated stress. Other sources of pain may be minute breaks in your heel bone or a heel spur, which is a bony growth on the underside of the heel bone. Tendonitis or bursitis (inflammation of the tendons or bursae) may also be part of painful heel syndrome. Indeed, sometimes there’s more than one contributing cause.

The initial symptom is usually discomfort in the heel first thing in the morning when you put pressure on your foot, and it may ease as the day goes on. If this happens to you, try home remedies (see below) and seek the advice of your chiropractor at Berkeley Heights Chiropractic Center to figure out what’s causing it. Rarely, infections, arthritis, gout, diabetes, and other ailments can be part of the problem.

Common Factors Promoting Heel Troubles

Bad biomechanics, which is another way of saying abnormalities in your walking or running gait that stress your heel bone and the tissues attached to it. Among these abnormalities may be excessive pronation, meaning that your feet roll inward too much when you walk or run. (Rolling outward too much is called supination.) Your heel should be the first part of your foot to hit the ground when you are walking, and ideally the arch distributes your weight first toward the outside of your foot and then toward the ball. But if your feet roll inward or outward too much, the weight is not properly distributed, and the plantar fascia and the heel bear excess stress.

Being overweight or habitually carrying heavy loads puts more pressure on your heels.

As you grow older, the pads that protect the heel from injury, like pads under a carpet, can wear down and thus not provide the shock absorption they once did.

Frequent running, walking, tennis playing, or other vigorous weight-bearing exercise are contributors, as well. Athletes, like older people, may be prone to heel pain, especially if they also have excessively pronated feet or other biomechanical problems.

Ill-fitting, thin-soled, or worn-down shoes, and wearing the wrong type of shoe while exercising can also lead to problems.



Prevention and Treatment

Heel pain, in most cases, is something you can prevent. As with many other injuries, prevention and treatment overlap to some extent.

Buy shoes that fit and have shock-absorbent soles, rigid shanks, and some extra padding in the heels. Good ankle counters are important, too, so your foot doesn't slip up and down.

Discard or repair any of your shoes with worn-down heels and soles.

If you must wear dress shoes for work, wear athletic shoes to and from work, as well as at home. Women should avoid both thin-soled flats and high heels.

If you are overweight, try to trim down.

Pace yourself in exercise and athletic activities. If your feet hurt, take a break. Find out why they hurt: are you overdoing it, and do your shoes fit?

Have your doctor at BHCC, who is an expert in body mechanics, check your gait and stance. If your feet pronate excessively, an orthotic device (a heel cup or other shoe insert) may prevent heel pain and can also be useful in treatment.

If your heel does begin to hurt, rest is the first line of defense. Limit your activities for a few days. If possible, switch to swimming, stationary cycling, weight-training, or sit-ups for exercise.

Tight calf muscles can tighten the fascia and contribute to heel pain, so you should do some calf stretches to prevent this.

Cold provides relief, too. Massage your heel with a small jar filled with ice. Or do foot-rollers: roll your heel over an ice-filled plastic jar or a container of frozen juice. Afterward, pull your toes upward with your fingers.

Your chiropractor at BHCC will adjust your foot and other areas of your body to relieve the biomechanical stress on your heel. Depending on what your diagnosis is, your doctor may tape and strap your foot, make a mold of your foot for a custom-fitted orthotic device, or suggest special exercise. Surgery is very rarely necessary except in some cases for removal of a spur.