

Plantar Fascitis

The plantar fascia is a thick, broad band of tissue that runs from under the heel to the ball of the foot. It helps maintain the arch alongside the ligaments and acts as a shock absorber. Plantar fasciitis is a painful condition caused by repetitive activity or overuse of the foot. The plantar fascia stretches which can cause microtears. Degeneration of the collagen fibres close to the attachment to the heel occurs, which leads to pain and dysfunction. It was first thought that the process of inflammation was involved in the condition but this theory is now usually disregarded.

Plantar fasciitis is a common injury for runners, dancers or jumpers, particularly for those who overpronate as this causes additional stretching of the plantar fascia. The most common cause is tight calf muscles leading to pronation of the foot. The plantar fascia thickens consequently losing flexibility and strength. In addition, inappropriate footwear without adequate support for the arch or poor cushioning can be attributed to plantar fasciitis. You are more likely to come across this condition if you are on your feet for many hours of the day or conversely if you lead a very sedentary lifestyle or and/or are overweight. If you have started running on a different surface you may also be more prone to it. The main symptom is pain just below the heel, particularly first thing in the morning when the fascia has tightened up overnight, and may be worsened when sudden stretching of the foot is required, such as walking up stairs.

Sports massage is an important part of the treatment process for plantar fasciitis as it will reduce the tension in the plantar fascia as well as stretch the calf muscles, achilles tendon region and the hip flexors/rotators to help this condition.

Soft tissue release techniques on the plantar fascia itself would be utilised by the sports massage therapist. Effleurage techniques working the superficial posterior leg muscles as well as the deeper muscles, such as posterior tibialis, would be effective. Stretching and myofascial work in and around the hip of the affected leg would help free up this area further. Trigger points within the plantar fascia, achilles and calf would be treated systematically. Treatment would be followed up even when pain has subsided in order to manage the condition.

Rest, and prescribed stretching by a physiotherapist, will also be a key factor in successful rehabilitation.

Prevention is clearly the best way of avoiding this injury, by refraining from running on hard surfaces, regularly changing trainers and making sure they have good cushioning and support, and effective stretching of the calf and achilles.