

## **Patient Information Leaflet about Plantar Heel Pain**

The aim of this leaflet is to give you some understanding of the problem you have with your heel and to provide some advice on how to manage this. It should be used in conjunction with the information you may have been given by your healthcare professional.

A common cause of heel pain or pain under the heel is irritation to the plantar fascia. When the plantar fascia is overloaded it can become thickened and cause discomfort along its length but more often under your heel. Heel pain usually goes away in time but this can take several months. The correct treatment can help speed up your recovery.

### **What is the plantar fascia?**

The plantar fascia is a band of thick elastic tissue which runs from your heel bone (calcaneus) to your toes. It works to store and return energy into your foot and leg and is part of the mechanism which supports your arch.



### **What are the possible symptoms?**

A pain under the heel which is worse taking the first steps after sleeping or after rest.

### **What may contribute to the symptoms of plantar heel pain?**

- Being overweight.
- Spending long periods standing or walking, especially a sudden increase in these activities.

- Wearing shoes or sandals which have a low heel and don't support the feet.
- Tightness in the muscles up the back of your legs.
- Weakness in the muscles in your feet or legs.
- Problems with the position of your feet.
- Occasionally, it can occur with inflammatory diseases.

### **What tests may be done?**

In the majority of cases, we do not need an x ray or any other tests to confirm what is wrong. The main way to diagnose this problem is through what you tell us and by examining your foot.

### **What can you do to help your plantar heel pain?**

- Aim for a healthy body weight.
- Avoid wearing hard, flat or unsupportive shoes.
- Apply an ice pack but only if wrapped in a damp towel, and only for around 5-10 minutes at a time. Please check your skin regularly as ice can burn.
- Follow the advice from your community pharmacist or other healthcare professional about taking medication. It is important to take medication regularly.
- Have patience, most people's symptoms get better by following this advice but it can take several months.
- Follow the advice and exercises in this leaflet.

### **What else can be done?**

If your pain does not start to improve after a period of 6-8 weeks of following the advice above, you may need to see a Podiatrist who can assess your foot and potentially recommend further treatment.

## Exercise leaflet information

**Exercises for plantar heel pain** It is important to do these exercises only to the level which you feel comfortable, they can cause some different feelings in your feet and legs but this should only last for a short period of time. If you have any questions, then please ask a health professional.

### Stretching Exercises

#### Exercise 1: Seated Calf Stretch

Use a towel wrapped around the ball of your foot and pull your foot towards you until you feel a stretch. Hold 30 seconds and repeat up to 10 times.



*Figure 1: Seat calf muscle stretch*

#### Exercise 2: Standing Calf Stretch

Stand with affected leg behind the other leg, keeping the heel down on the floor and the knee straight. Lean forward bending the front knee forward until you feel a stretch in your calf and Achilles tendon (ankle area). Hold 30 seconds and repeat 10 times.



*Figure 2: Calf Stretch, knee straight*

### **Exercise 3: Calf stretch**

Repeat as exercise 2 but with knee of affected leg slightly bent.



*Figure 3: Calf Stretch, knee bent*

#### **Exercise 4: Heel Raises**

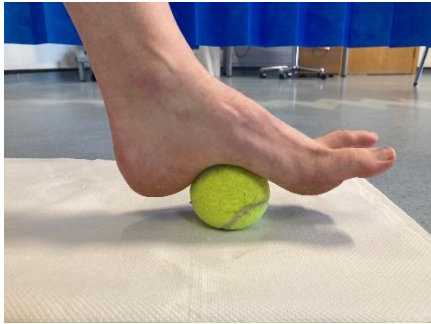
Standing on the ground raise up onto your toes then slowly lower your heels towards the ground. Repeat for 3 sets of 15 repetitions. If this feels too difficult, or you feel off balance, try similar exercises from a sitting position.



*Figure 4: Heel Raises*

#### **5. Tennis Ball Exercises**

While seated using a soft tennis ball, applying pressure under your foot, roll it in all directions under the sole of your foot working it from the heel towards the toes and then from side to side. Repeat this exercise as often as you can.



*Figure 5: Tennis ball massage*

## **6. Arch Exercise**

Place your foot flat on ground, gently press your big toe into the ground and be careful not to claw it. Keeping your heel in place raise your arch upwards and hold for 2 seconds.

Repeat 15 times



*Figure 6: Arch exercise*