

Plantar Fascitis and Heel Spurs

Plantar fascitis and heel spurs are one of the most common causes of heel pain. The most common causes of heel problems are caused by a painful tearing of the plantar fascia, (a dense fibrous connective tissue) connecting the toes and the heel. This can result in either heel spurs of plantar fascitis. A heel spur is a point of excess bone growth on the heel. The bone growth usually extends forward towards the toes.

If your foot flattens or becomes unstable during critical times during walking or running, the insertion of the plantar fascia into your heel may begin to stretch and pull away from the bone, resulting in pain and swelling. The pain is more noticeable when you push off with your toes while walking. This movement further stretches the already inflamed portion of the fascia. The pain is normally centered at a location just in front of the heel toward the arch of the foot. When the tearing occurs at the bone itself, new bone formation will occur at the site, resulting in a heel spur. The pain associated with plantar fascitis is most notable on arising in the morning or after periods of rest during the day and often temporarily improves with ambulation. The pain of this condition may cause you to try to walk on your toes, or alter your running stride, which can lead to further damage and problems in your foot as well as ankle, knee, hip, or back.

What is it that causes plantar fascitis?

Plantar fascitis onset is insidious and it is not associated with a specific incident or trauma. Its cause can be attributed to a repetitive, biomechanical insufficiency. The most frequent cause is an abnormal motion of the foot called excessive pronation. In normal gait your foot will strike the ground on the heel, and then roll forward toward your toes, and inward toward the arch. The arch should only drop slightly during this motion. If it lowers too much, you have excessive pronation. This deviation can and will place abnormal stresses on the plantar fascia itself, and its sites or insertion into the bones of the feet.

Other factors which may contribute to plantar fascitis and heel spurs include a sudden increase in daily activities, increase in weight, changes in training regimen (intensity and duration), or a change of shoes.

Now that I know what is causing my foot pain, what can I do to treat it?

For those with a highly active lifestyle, an evaluation of changes in your training should be done. A decrease in workout intensity and duration is important. Of great importance is making sure that your shoes fit correctly. Your shoes should control the forces that contribute to plantar

fascitis. Check your running shoes and make sure they are not excessively worn. They should bend only at the ball of the foot, where your toes attach to the foot. **Avoid** any shoe that bends in the center of the arch or behind the ball of the foot. These shoes offer insufficient support and will stress your plantar fascia.

When pain persists, physical therapy may be in order. Physical therapy can offer varying modalities (ultrasound, electrical stimulation, etc.), stretching regimens, exercise programs, gait analysis, and orthotic recommendations to hasten the healing process.

For further information on the treatment of plantar fasciitis and heel spurs, please contact us.