

Patient information

# Plantar fasciopathy

(Also known as 'plantar fasciitis' or  
'Chronic Plantar Heel Pain')

**Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:**

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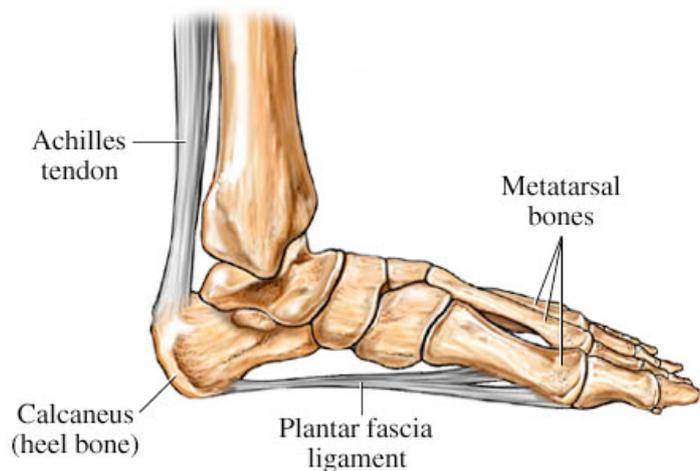


## What is plantar fasciopathy?

Plantar fasciopathy is sometimes called plantar fasciitis or chronic plantar heel pain. It causes pain in the soft tissues in the heel and the bottom of the foot. These soft tissues are called the plantar fascia. The role of this area is to help keep the arch of the foot in the right place by acting as a shock absorber.

## What causes plantar fasciopathy?

We know that pain usually comes from some wear and tear (degeneration) of the plantar fascia. This may happen through overuse (e.g. walking more than normal).



Plantar fasciopathy can develop either suddenly or gradually over time. The condition is common in both active people as well as those with a less active lifestyle. Other risk factors include:

- Calf muscle tightness
- Weakness in the calf muscles
- Low arches or flat feet (Pes planus) or high arches (pes cavus)

- Increased body weight (High BMI)
- Sudden increase in walking or running, especially in those who normally have low activity levels

## **What are the symptoms?**

- Pain in the heel area
- Pain first thing in the morning when putting your heel down, that lessens as you start walking
- Pain when you start walking after a period of sitting still
- Pain with standing for a long time
- Pain can sometimes worsen towards the end of the day
- Tightness in the calf muscle

## **What can I do to help reduce my pain / symptoms?**

- If the pain is severe, try to reduce the amount of walking you do
- Regular stretching of your calf muscles if these muscles are tight
- A soft / gel heel cushion may help. These can be bought in most pharmacies
- Simple pain relief such as paracetamol and non-specific anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) may help (e.g. Ibuprofen). Discuss with your pharmacist or GP

- Wearing well-fitted and supportive shoes such as trainers.
- Think ahead about activities that may flare your symptoms
  - If you are planning e.g. a walking holiday/a running race, ensure you prepare and train for it gradually to avoid a sudden increases in activity
  - If you have a high body weight, healthy eating and steady weight loss may help you reduce your pain

### **What other treatments are there?**

- In a small number of cases, injections may be helpful to reduce pain, although this is not normally effective
- Shockwave therapy may help, however this is a new treatment and more evidence is needed to show this is effective for plantar fasciopathy

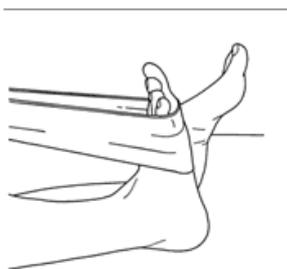
## What exercises can I do to help reduce my symptoms?

### Stretches:

If your calf muscles are tight you may benefit from the following stretches for the calf muscles. Only do these if they do not cause your heel pain.



- Stand behind a chair or facing a wall with the painful foot behind you.
- Keeping both the heels on the floor and back leg straight, slowly bend the front knee until you feel a stretch in the calf of the painful leg.
- Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 4 times. If this is too painful, try the stretch below instead.

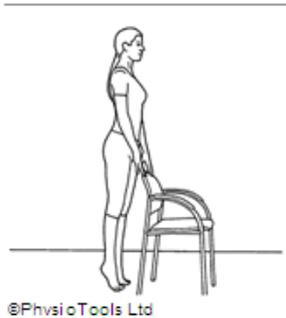


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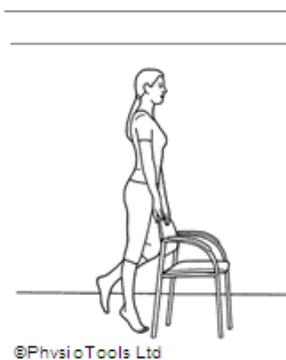
- Sit and place a towel around the bottom of the painful foot as shown.
- With both hands slowly pull the towel towards you until you feel a stretch in the calf muscle.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 4 times.

## Strengthening:

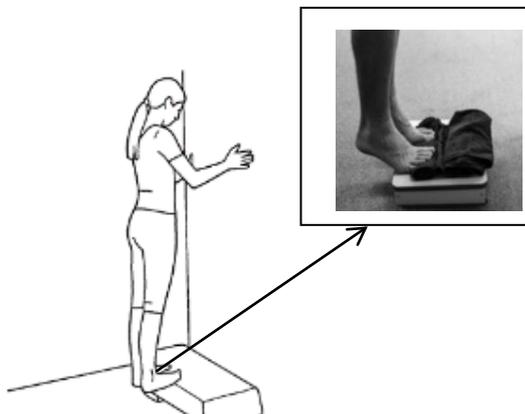
If it doesn't cause increased pain, the following strengthening exercises can be started:



- Stand tall
- Push down on the toes to lift the heel
- Hold for up to 30 seconds if tolerable.
- Repeat 3 times.



- Stand on one leg
- Push up onto your toes.
- Hold for up to 30 seconds if tolerable.
- Repeat 3 times.



- Stand on the bottom step.
- Place a towel folded up a few times under your toes so they are above your heel (see picture).
- Rise onto both toes and slowly lower the heels so the heel drops below the step.
- Start with low repetitions and 1-2 sets. As pain allows, increase to 15 reps, x2-3 sets.
- Repeat every other day.



- Keeping the towel under the toes, progress the above exercise onto one leg
- Only as pain allows

## **What if my symptoms do not improve?**

If your pain does not improve with the exercises or your pain and symptoms increase, please consult your GP for further management.

## **References**

1. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/heel-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx>  
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg311>
2. High-load strength training improves outcomes in patients with plantar fasciitis: A randomised controlled trial with 12-month follow-up. Rattleff MS et al, 2014, *Scandinavian J of Medicine & Science in Sports* 25 (3): e292-e300.

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