

A close-up photograph of a person's bare foot stepping onto green grass. The foot is the central focus, with the heel and arch clearly visible. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a path.

**GET A HANDLE ON YOUR  
HEEL PAIN GUIDE**



American Podiatric Medical Association

[www.apma.org/heelpain](http://www.apma.org/heelpain)



## Take a Moment to Focus in on Your Feet.

Does one (or even both) of your heels hurt? If so, you aren't alone. A study by the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) has found that nearly 40 percent of all Americans have suffered from heel pain at some point in their lives.

So what causes heel pain? Furthermore, what are the best ways to fix this problem that can drastically impact your quality of life? Can heel pain be prevented entirely?

Determining the cause of heel pain is not always a simple answer, but early treatment is vital. Educating yourself about the main causes of heel pain, as well as the best ways that you and your podiatrist can treat and prevent this common foot condition, will help keep your feet healthy and pain-free.

# Plantar Fasciitis

## WHAT IS CAUSING MY HEEL PAIN?

### What are some common causes of heel pain?

The number one cause of heel pain is a condition called **plantar fasciitis**. It is often characterized by pain on the bottom of the heel when you take your first steps in the morning, but can also last all day long—with pain often progressing the longer the condition remains untreated. In addition, other common causes of heel pain include tendinitis, stress fractures, neuritis, bursitis, tarsal tunnel syndrome, arthritis, and fat pad thinning.

### What can cause Plantar Fasciitis specifically?

Plantar fasciitis can be caused by a number of factors, including weight gain, worn-out shoes, walking barefoot, increasing exercise, and walking on hard surfaces without proper support. Any of these factors, in combination with how your feet function mechanically, can cause plantar fasciitis.



### What are my possible treatment options if I've already been diagnosed with heel pain?

Once your podiatrist examines your feet and determines the cause of your pain, you may be treated immediately with options such as custom orthotics, steroid injections, prescription medications, physical therapy, and immobilization.

Depending on your response to treatment, your pain may require more advanced treatments or surgery. Talk to your podiatrist about what avenue of treatment is best for you.

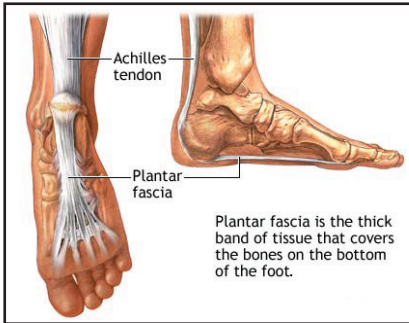
### My podiatrist told me that my feet roll inward too much while walking, calling it "pronation." How can pronation contribute to heel pain?

Excessive pronation can create an abnormal amount of stretching and pulling on the ligaments and tendons that attach to the bottom back of the heel bone. It can also contribute to problems of the hip, knee and lower back.

### Is there anything I can do on my own to relieve heel pain?

**Absolutely!** There are several steps you can take to help relieve many types of heel pain, as well as prevent the condition before it starts. For more information, (see page 9, "Ways To Avoid Heel Pain").

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PLANTAR FASCIITIS



The primary cause of heel pain, plantar fasciitis is an inflammation of the tissue band (fascia) connecting the heel bone to the base of the toes. This pain is generally centered under the heel, and

can be caused by (but not limited to) activities that include: wearing improper footwear, excessive weight, walking barefoot and/or walking barefoot on hard surfaces, and an increase in exercise. While many heel pain sufferers often assume their heel pain is caused by a heel spur on the heel bone (commonly referred to as “heel spur syndrome”), heel spurs have been proven to **not** be the cause of heel pain.

Plantar fasciitis is often successfully treated with custom orthotics prescribed by a podiatrist, injections, prescription medications, physical therapy and immobilization. The longer plantar fasciitis goes untreated, the more difficult it is to find relief, so above all, visit a podiatrist at the first sign of heel pain.

## FOOTWEAR AND HEEL PAIN

An APMA survey found that 45 percent of Americans attribute their heel pain to wearing uncomfortable or ill-fitting shoes. What types of footwear are “best bets” for avoiding heel pain?

Footwear Type	Problem	Solution
Athletic Shoe	Heel pain can occur while wearing athletic shoes—especially if the shoe has a worn heel or sole, or does not provide enough support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Replace shoes with excessive or uneven wear on soles and heels.</li><li>▪ Replace shoes every 350-500 miles.</li><li>▪ To test the support of the heel, press the sides and make sure they do not collapse.</li></ul>
Ballet Flat	This popular style of shoe can cause plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendon strain and an overall feeling of tiredness in the feet and legs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Make sure the shoe doesn't bend too easily in the middle.</li><li>▪ Use an over-the-counter insert to provide support.</li><li>▪ Don't walk long distances in these shoes.</li></ul>
Flip-Flop	Surprisingly, this easy-to-wear shoe can lead to plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendon strain. Daily wear of flip-flops can also cause calluses in the heel area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Select flip-flops made of natural materials such as soft, supple leather. The heel of your foot should not hang over the edge.</li><li>▪ Look for styles with a built-in arch.</li></ul>
Fashion Sneaker	This type of sneaker may cause plantar fasciitis due to the flexible sole and the lack of arch and heel support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Make sure the sneakers have laces and the soles don't twist.</li><li>▪ Don't wear this shoe for exercise; it is not intended for athletic activities.</li></ul>

## SPORTS AND HEEL PAIN

Participating in sports that include jarring starts and stops, or sports performed on uneven surfaces, can quickly lead to heel pain. The chart below outlines several popular sporting activities and tips to avoid heel pain during each:

<u>Sport</u>	<u>Problem</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Running	Pain in the arch and bottom of the heel can be caused by both short and long distance running.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose the correct shoe for running, short or long distances, this can prevent most pain.</li> <li>Try over-the-counter insoles, they can sometimes help to relieve pain by providing cushion and shock absorption. Custom orthotics help many runners.</li> <li>Replace worn shoes every 350-500 miles.</li> </ul>
Walking & Hiking	Walking and hiking may irritate a Haglund's deformity, which is a bump on the back of the heel bone where the Achilles tendon attaches. It can become larger or inflamed over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wearing shoes or boots with stiff heel counters can irritate the heel bone, especially on steep uphill.</li> <li>Selecting a shoe with a lower or softer heel counter may relieve pain.</li> <li>Using heel lifts and custom orthotics can reposition the heel and reduce irritation.</li> </ul>
Tennis	Tennis may cause pain on the outer sides of the heel due to body positioning during play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase stretching at the first signs of heel pain. Include stretching the hamstrings.</li> <li>Using insoles and custom molded orthotic devices available from a podiatric physician can help.</li> </ul>
Basketball	Basketball, as well as other jarring sports, can cause stress fractures and pain on the bottom, back and sides of the heel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High-top shoes can help to keep the foot stable.</li> <li>Stretch the entire leg and foot before playing.</li> <li>Heel lifts and custom foot orthoses can prevent pain or provide relief.</li> </ul>

## WAYS TO AVOID HEEL PAIN

Heel pain, if detected early, can usually be treated with conservative options. However, the longer you wait to have heel pain addressed by a podiatrist, the more difficult it is to successfully treat.

Looking for the best ways to avoid heel pain altogether? Consider the following:

### Always:

- Wear supportive shoes
- Avoid walking barefoot
- Stretch your feet well prior to exercising
- Ice your heel if pain is felt

If heel pain persists, **always** schedule an appointment with a podiatrist for evaluation to avoid complications in treatment.

## HEEL PAIN TREATMENT OPTIONS

### Medical Treatments:

Commonly prescribed treatments for heel pain include:

- custom orthotic insoles
- night splints
- non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medication

Additionally, podiatric medicine is on the cutting-edge of technology when it comes to both diagnosing and treating heel pain. Whether through the use of radio frequency technology, shockwave therapy or another form of treatment, technology for heel pain treatment is evolving everyday. Discuss treatment options that are right for you with your doctor.

## HEEL PAIN TREATMENT OPTIONS

### Over-the-Counter (OTC) treatment options:

- **Insoles** – OTC insole products, such as those made by Spenco and Pedag USA, can often provide some relief by stabilizing the foot and helping to correct overpronation.
- **Heel Supports** – Supports such as those made by Spenco and Sorbothane are specifically designed to cup the heel using gel supports.



## A FINAL WORD ON HEEL PAIN

While many Americans take their feet for granted, always focusing in on your foot health can ensure that you never lose a step to heel pain.

Remember, if detected early, chances are high that your heel pain can be treated successfully. To get more information on heel pain, visit the APMA's Web site, [apma.org](http://apma.org). There, you'll learn about other specific kinds of heel pain, the latest advances in heel pain treatment technology and much more!

While heel pain may be common, remember...

foot pain of any kind is **never** considered normal.

If you experience any discomfort in your heels or other areas of the foot or lower leg, **see a podiatrist.**

**Podiatrists Keep America Walking.**







**American Podiatric Medical Association**

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[www.apma.org/heelpain](http://www.apma.org/heelpain) • 1.800.FootCare