Orthopaedic Connection

Onset of Heel Pain

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Anyone who has never had pain in their heel, raise your hand. Well, there are a few hands, but not many. It is common and many people are seen in the office with it. It doesn’t seem related to age as heel pain in all adult age groups can occur.

Cause
There is a thick band of tissue in your foot that stretches from the ball to the heel. It is called the plantar fascia. It is thought that small tears occur in the fascia where it attaches to the heel bone. This tearing results in inflammation in the area which can cause intense pain. Specific injury is not thought to be the cause of the tearing. Probably little tears occur slowly and then progress.

Diagnosis – The Ice Pick
Almost the hallmark of plantar fasciitis is that it hurts in the morning with the first few steps. As you move around it calms down and then hurts later in the day. It usually doesn’t disappear however during the day. Many patients say it is as if an ice pick is poking the center of the heel. It also occurs as start up pain after sitting for awhile then you get up to walk and “OUCH”.

Some Causes
In most people it just happens. You’re more likely to have it if you have
- Excessive weight
- Diabetes
- High arches or flat feet
- To stand a lot on a hard surface, usually at work

What Else Could It Be?
Heel pain like this can come from a stress fracture. This almost always occurs in those who walk excessively or over train athletically. Normal walking hardly ever causes a stress fracture. Older people who have osteopenia (low bone mass) can develop stress fractures. A heel spur may be present with the inflammation and pain. But lots of people with spurs have no pain. It gets confusing!

Treatment
1. First line treatment is;
   - Ice it
   - A soft spongy heel cup or a gel pad in the shoe
   - Shoes that give good support (not flip-flops!)
   - Ibuprofen or similar
   - A night splint to keep the achilles tendon stretched

2. Inject heel with steroid in the office
3. Go to physical therapy for specific treatment
4. It can take 3 – 6 months to resolve, but it almost always does resolve.
5. You probably don’t need $300-400 custom orthotics
6. Less than 5% of the time surgery might be needed
7. Losing weight can help
8. Platelet-rich plasma injections are rarely done. Your insurance won’t pay for it so it isn’t a real popular treatment.

You can try some things on your own too and they might help.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

**Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website**
I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem.
Please log onto [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous GCH articles.
Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.
Good health, good life, all the best to you. Be well.
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