

## PAINFUL HEEL SYNDROME

The painful heel is a common complaint in both the non-athlete as well as the athlete. The painful heel syndrome (PHS) is also known as plantar fasciitis or sometimes a heel spur. While the PHS does not produce severe or disabling pain, it does produce aggravating pain that tends to limit or curb activities (i.e., running, etc.).

Many myths exist concerning the painful heel syndrome, especially when dealing with the cause. It is still widely held by the majority of physicians and certainly by the lay public that this is secondary to a plantar heel spur. Plantar heel spurs exist in patients with PHS at approximately a 50% rate while the general public without heel pain have heel spurs in 25% of their heels. Therefore, it can be seen that a heel spur is by statistics alone probably not the inciting cause. Furthermore, the heel spur probably represents evidence of a previous injury or traction from the plantar fascia. Therefore, a heel spur is not the cause of heel pain.

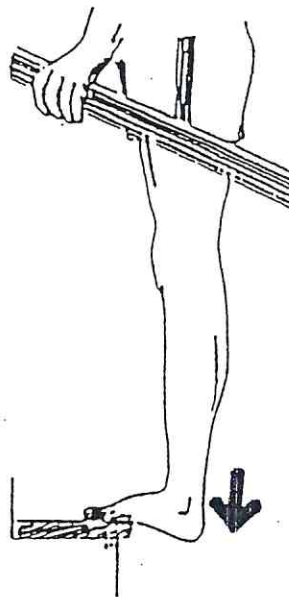
We believe that the achilles tendon is tight along with the plantar fascial irritation. This tightness sets up a re-injury phenomenon, which prolongs the duration of the patient's symptoms.

The treatment which I use and have found to be very effective both in runners and non-runners is a three part regimen which includes:

- 1) M-F heel cup worn in the shoe to help relieve the pain. This or any other shoe device only helps alleviate pain, they will not eradicate the source of the pain.
- 2) Wearing of jogging or tennis shoes with good padding as often as possible. Avoid higher heeled shoes.
- 3) An aggressive stretching program of the heel cord is most important in order to remove the stress placed on the plantar fascia.

This stretching should be done 3 times a day, five minutes each time, as you have been shown. In the beginning, the amount you stretch will vary due to pain or soreness of the calf muscles. You may have to start off at a level of less time, perhaps only 2-3 minutes to start with. Eventually, you should build up to a total stretching time of 5 minutes three times daily. This exercise should be a gradual stretching of the achilles tendon. Do not bounce up and down. Let gravity do the work for you. Just allow your weight to drop back on your heels. (See diagram below)

Wear Tennis  
Type Shoes



The majority of patients experience a 10-15% increase in their pain 2-3 weeks after beginning the stretching program. This is a minor increase in pain, nothing excruciating.

If you will continue with the stretching program and work through this pain, it will begin to resolve in about 7-10 days. This is the point when your PHS will begin to improve. However, this will take an up and down course where you will have some good days and some bad days. As you can see by the pain chart below, however, your heel pain will continue to make a slow gradual improvement after about the third week. By using this treatment, you should be able to alleviate the majority of symptoms by 6-12 weeks. In general, 85% of our patients will obtain near to complete relief of their pain by 12 weeks. Once you have obtained relief, you should consider a modified program of the stretching as part of your normal daily routine to prevent a return of the PHS. If, however, you have faithfully followed this program for 12 weeks and are still experiencing pain with no improvement, give us a call or return to the office so we can discuss it.

