Plantar Fasciitis

The plantar fascia is a strong band of fibrous tissue that stretches from your heel to your toes. It supports the arch of your foot but also acts as shock-absorber when standing, walking or for example during sporting activity. Repeated small injuries and decreased blood supply to the fascia results in inflammation and pain under the heel and in the arch of the foot. This is commonly referred to as plantar fasciitis. It is most frequently seen in people with altered foot mechanics, people who stand on their feet for long periods, or those who have recently started exercising or changed their activity levels.

Treatment Plan:

Plantar fasciitis can often be controlled with conservative treatment and can get better with time if adequate measures are taken to allow the injury to settle and to increase the blood supply.

Rest:

It is important to understand that unlike muscles, fascia has a poor blood supply. Therefore it is important, where possible, to rest from or decrease activities which tend to cause your symptoms to flare up. This allows the inflammation to settle and encourages healing.

Ice and Heat Packs:

Both ice and heat have beneficial properties in the treatment and management of plantar fasciitis. Ice can help reduce inflammation and can be an effective pain reliever. It is advisable to use ice when symptoms are at their worst or, for example, after a prolonged period on your feet. Heat can help to stimulate blood supply and facilitate the healing process.

Make sure that ice and heat application is completed safely by wrapping an ice pack/hot water bottle in a towel and applying for 20 minutes per once every hour practical. It is important to regularly check the skin for any signs of irritation or burning.

Do not use ice if you have poor sensation at the site of application, an infectious wound or cryoglobilinemia.

Self Massage:

Simple self massage techniques (see overleaf) can also be effective in promoting blood supply to the area, can help with the mobility of the plantar fascia and in many cases play an important role in self- management and maintenance of your condition.

Exercises:

It is clinically proven that regular exercise can helps to maintain range of movement, muscle tone and can prevent injury. However these have to be the right exercises at the right time. Tight calf muscles can be a symptom or cause of plantar fasciitis. Either way gentle stretching (see overleaf) can help relieve symptoms.

Footwear:

Evidence shows that wearing inappropriate footwear can lead to altered foot biomechanics and in turn pain, discomfort and injury. When considering footwear which can best manage symptoms related to plantar fasciitis it is advisable to focus primarily on supportive shoes/trainers. Open toed sandals and flip-flops often may feel comfortable but in the long term can cause more damage to the structures of the foot.

Exercises for Plantar Fasciitis

Plantar fascia stretch with towel

Loop a towel around the ball of your affected foot.
Keeping your knee straight gently pull your toes towards yourself.
You should feel a light stretch in the arch of the foot and through the calf. Stop if this causes an increase in symptoms. Hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds and repeat it 5 times, twice a day.
Some people find this more comfortable with a slightly bent knee.

Calf stretch in standing (Knee Bent)

Adopt the posture in the picture above (or facing a wall/chair for balance if required) with the affected side behind you. Bend your back knee slightly before slowly bending the front knee. You will should feel a light stretch through the rearmost calf – stop at this point and hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 8-10 times twice a day.

Calf stretch in standing (Knee Straight)

The above can be repeated with the rearmost knee straight ensuring all structures are stretched.

Self-massage

Place a solid object such as a rolling pin, golf ball or tennis ball under the arch of your foot. Gently roll your foot back and forth. This can be performed in standing but generally is most comfortable sitting. You can vary the pressure depending on pain and comfort levels. It is advisable to start massaging the area 30 seconds at a time, repeating throughout the day then gradually build to several minutes at a time. The pressure may cause some discomfort initially. As stated above ice can help settle this post treatment irritation. Should you find self-massage increases or exacerbates your symptoms reduce the pressure applied or if still not settling stop completely.

It is important to note that due to the often chronic nature of the condition and difficulty resting the area, self-management most likely will need to be adhered to over a prolonged period of time.