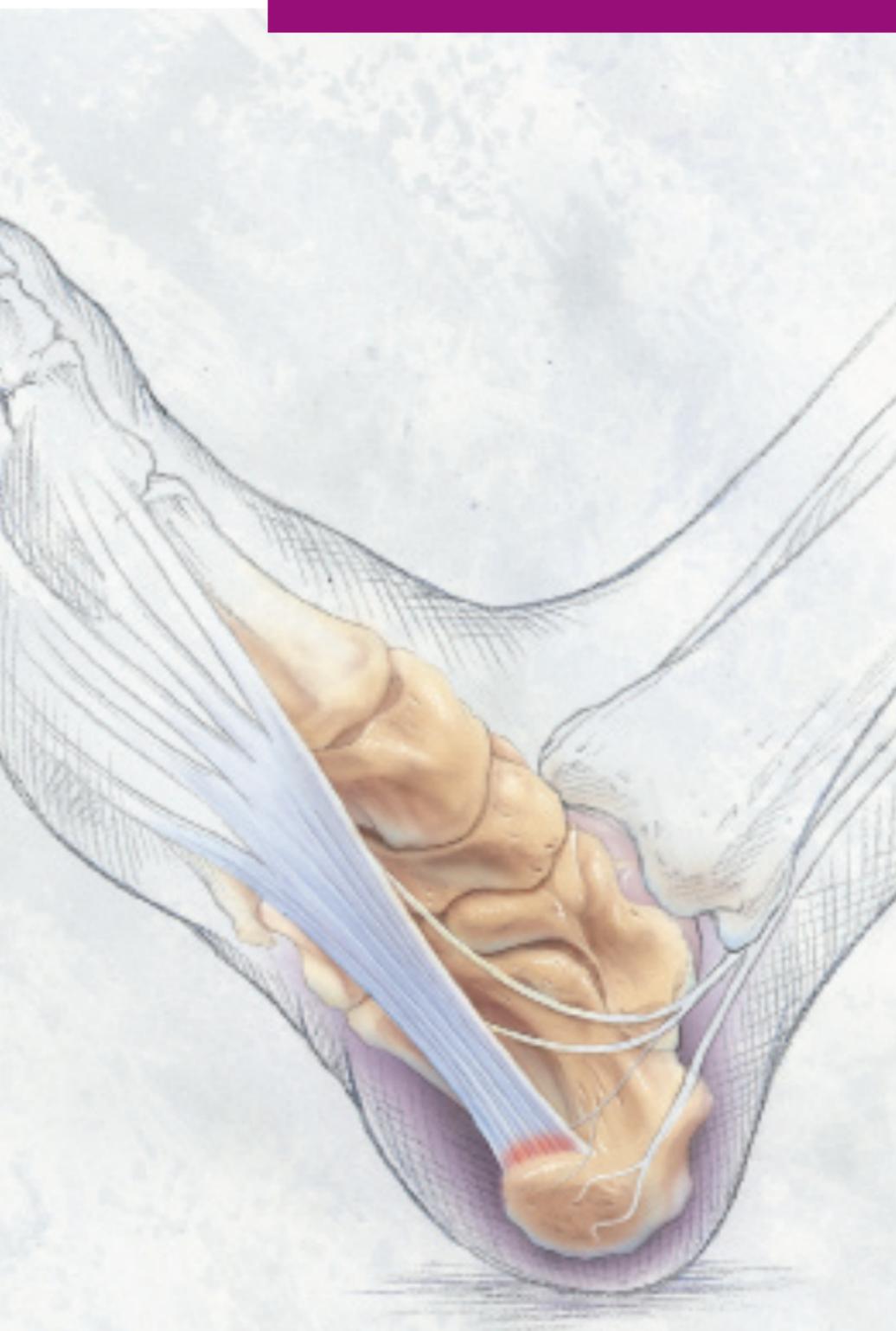


# Understanding Heel Pain



# What Causes Heel Pain?

Heel pain is a common problem that occurs when the heel is placed under too much stress. Heel pain is most often caused by walking in ways that irritate tissues in the heel. It can also be caused by wearing poorly fitting shoes, playing active sports, standing for long periods, or being overweight.



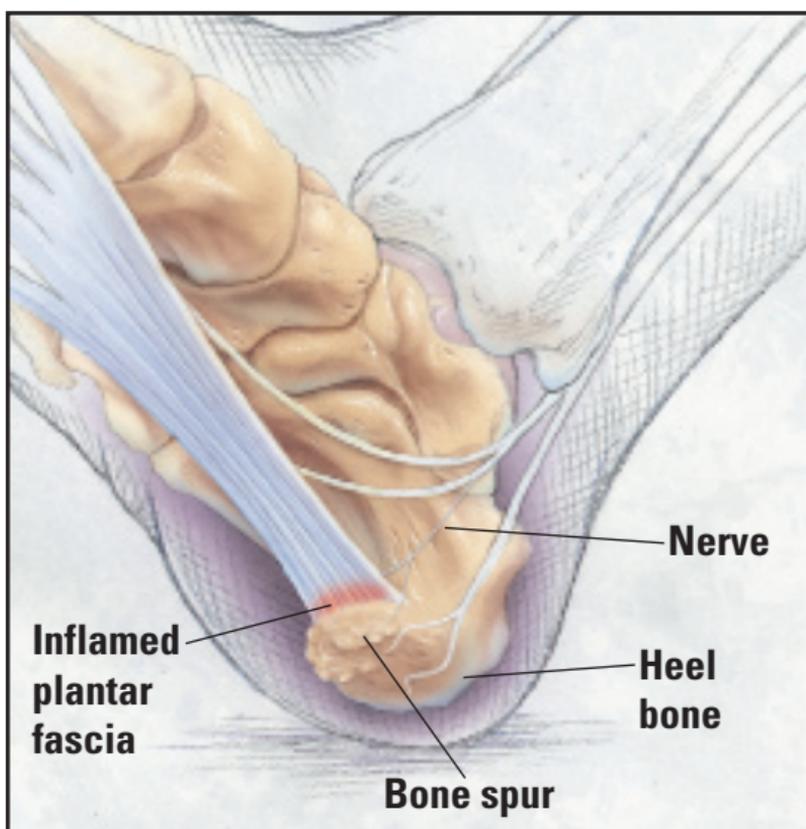
## Symptoms

Symptoms of heel pain differ for each person. You may have one or more of the following:

- Pain on the bottom, edge, or back of the heel
- Sharp pain when you get out of bed, or when you stand up after sitting for a while
- Burning or a shooting pain in your heel
- A dull ache in the heel after standing for a long time on a hard surface, or during running

# Inside the Heel

The heel bone is the largest bone in the foot. A band of fibrous tissue called the **plantar fascia** connects the heel bone to bones in the ball of the foot. If the foot is placed under too much stress, it can strain the plantar fascia and cause painful inflammation. Stress on the foot can also inflame other tissues, such as the Achilles tendon (tendonitis) and a small cushion of tissue in the heel called the bursa (bursitis). In some cases, a small growth called a bone spur may form where the plantar fascia attaches to the heel bone.



## Your Evaluation

To learn more about your heel pain, your doctor will ask questions about your health. You'll also have a foot exam. Be sure to mention exactly where your heel hurts, and if it hurts more at certain times. If needed, your doctor may recommend x-rays or other tests to help show bone and tissue problems.

# Treating Heel Pain

There's no single way to treat heel pain. So your doctor may suggest one or more treatments. Keep in mind, the tissues in your heel may take 6 months or more to fully heal. If these treatments don't improve your symptoms, your doctor may suggest surgery to relieve pressure on the plantar fascia.

## Shoes and Inserts

Changing your footwear can make a big difference in how you feel. Buy shoes with good cushioning in the soles and heels. To add cushioning, put a heel cup or pad in your shoe. If needed, your doctor may prescribe a special shoe insert or use tape and padding to cushion your feet.



## Contrast Baths

To help relieve pain, soak your foot in warm water for 30 seconds. Then soak it in cool water for 30 seconds. Go back and forth between warm and cool for 5 minutes. Do this 3 to 4 times a day. You can also reduce pain by holding an ice pack on the heel 3 to 4 times a day for 5 minutes at a time.

## Medication

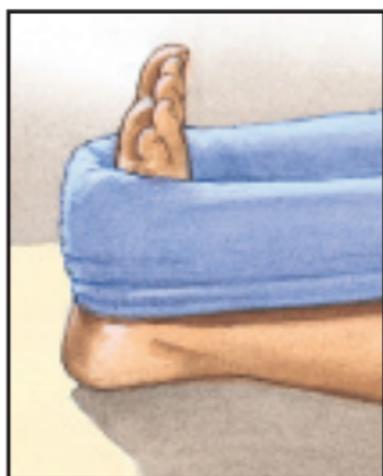
Your doctor may suggest taking medications, such as ibuprofen, to reduce tissue inflammation in the heel. If your pain persists, your doctor may inject cortisone into the tissue to reduce inflammation.

## Stretches

The following stretches can help relieve pressure on the heel. Stop any exercise that causes sharp pain.

### Foot Stretch

- Lie on your back with your legs straight.
- Stretch your toes toward you. Or put a towel around the ball of your foot and pull it toward you.
- Hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat 10 times.



### Heel Stretch

- Stand with the ball of the painful foot on the edge of a step. Hold the railing to maintain balance.
- Slowly drop the heel down until you feel a stretch in your calf.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 4 times a day.



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## Surgical Treatment

If other treatments don't help your pain, your doctor may recommend surgery. Talk with your doctor to learn more about these procedures.

- **Plantar fasciotomy** relieves strain on the plantar fascia by making a small cut in the tissue. This may be done using a small scope (endoscopically), or with an open incision in the heel.
- **Shock wave therapy** uses a special device to focus sound waves on the heel bone. This stimulates a healing response in the body and helps reduce pain.

# Preventing Future Problems

Wearing shoes with plenty of support and cushioning will help prevent heel pain from coming back. Avoid walking on uneven surfaces, or going barefoot. You can also prevent future problems by doing exercises that stretch muscles in the lower leg.

## Calf Stretch

- Stand with one foot an arm's length away from a tree or wall. Place the other foot about a foot behind.
- Keeping both heels on the ground, bend the knee closest to the tree or wall. Keep your back leg straight. Hold 15 to 20 seconds.
- Now bend both knees. Hold 15 to 20 seconds. Relax.
- Repeat 10 times. Then switch legs.



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