

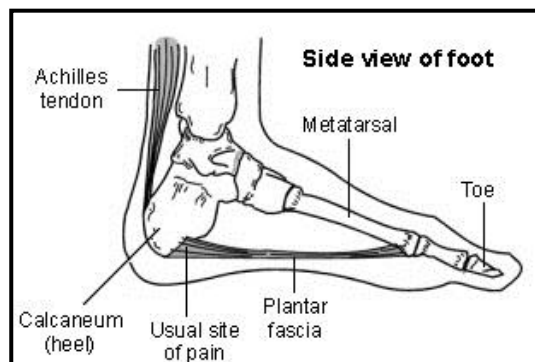
Heel Pain:

Heel Spur Syndrome & Plantar Fasciitis

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Heel spurs and plantar fasciitis occur as a result of excessive pull of the plantar fascia on the heel. The plantar fascia is a thick band of connective tissue that provides support to the arches and has stresses put on it during weight bearing activities. During running, large amounts of stress are put through the plantar fascia causing repeated micro trauma. This pull can cause a spike-like growth of bone to form called a heel spur. This spur is usually not the primary cause of pain, but inflammation of the plantar fascia leads to formation of adhesions during rest that get torn during weight bearing.



Plantar fasciitis usually results in pain in the heel that tends to be the worst with the first few steps in the morning or after running over long distances. This morning pain is not the way you'll want to start your day! Repeated stresses in weight bearing as occurs with running will continue to stretch out the plantar fascia causing damage that will not be able to heal unless given time to rest and aggravating factors are eliminated.

Prevention is the best way to treat plantar fasciitis and heel spurs. There are many potential biomechanical issues that can lead to abnormal stresses on the foot. One of the most common problems is flat feet. If the foot is flat or "pronated" during weight bearing, excessive pull will be applied to the plantar fascia. Physical therapists, athletic trainers, and podiatrists can all give advice on how to correct flat feet with the use of exercises, orthotics, or taping. Tight calf muscles can also contribute to improper mechanics at the ankle. Warm up and stretching exercises are great for injury prevention and promotion of healthy muscles. It's important when starting a running program to gradually increase the distance so that the body has time to adapt. Some other causes of abnormal stresses on the foot are improper foot wear and increased body weight. Both of these are alarmingly common and need to be taken care of. Shoes are generally supposed to be replaced every 350 miles.

There are many different treatment options for those who already have plantar fasciitis or heel spurs. This first step is conservative treatment which would consist of eliminating anything that will aggravate the pain to allow the tissue to heal. This can be as simple as rest and ice, but should be more thorough than that to eradicate whatever caused the problem in the first place. As the injury begins to heal, controlled stresses can be applied to the foot that will promote healing while preventing re-injury. Physical therapists are able to apply other modalities that encourage tissue healing and also help to get rid of any predisposing factors that initially caused the plantar fasciitis. Usually modifications to your training regimen will be needed. In the most extreme cases, as when left untreated too long, surgery can be done. Surgery will usually consist of removal of the heel spur and lengthening of the plantar fascia. Rehab after this operation is similar to, but slower than, the conservative treatment mentioned above, so if you want to get back to running as soon as possible take care of your foot before it gets to be a bigger problem. If the problem is caught early and treated with skilled Physical Therapy, rehab has a 98% success rate. Schedule an appointment with a physical therapist for an assessment of risk factors and strategies for prevention.

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