

# Achieving pain-free movement

Dr Gowreeson Thevendran from Island Orthopaedics, Mount Alvernia Medical Centre, explains what is plantar fasciitis and how it can be treated.



## What is plantar fasciitis and how does it affect the foot?

Plantar fasciitis is a common condition that causes chronic heel pain, usually a severe stabbing sensation in the bottom of the foot beside the heel.

It affects the plantar fascia — a band of deep tissue that runs from your heel bone to your toes — which supports the arch of your foot as a shock absorber. Tearing or injuring this tissue, either through overuse or constant pressure, may trigger inflammation, leading to plantar fasciitis.

An estimated 10 per cent of people will suffer from this condition at some point in their life. Plantar fasciitis usually affects only one foot, although sometimes, it can affect both.

## How do I recognise its symptoms?

The most obvious one is a dull, sharp or burning pain around the heel. You may also experience tenderness along the sole of your foot, or in the middle of the foot as well.

Plantar fasciitis sufferers have difficulty walking and experience pain usually when waking up from bed or after sitting for a long time. They also feel pain after exercising, as that is when the foot's soft tissues start to tighten.

## What causes this condition, and who is at risk?

It is not clear what the exact causes are, but certain risk factors may lead to it.

Those at high risk include endurance runners, or people whose jobs require standing for long periods of time.

Those aged between 40 and 70 are

also at higher risk, with women more likely to be affected than men. This may be due to hormonal differences between men and women.

Being overweight is another risk factor since there is constant pressure on the plantar fascia ligament. Women in the late stages of pregnancy are also more prone to plantar fasciitis, due to the increased weight they carry.

Also, those with flat feet typically have a tighter plantar fascial band, which has a higher risk of tearing or getting inflamed.

## Describe the treatment options.

The RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) method is advised for first-time sufferers. Treatment for repeat patients and those with flat feet include wearing supportive footwear or customised orthotics, sometimes with splints or braces that stretch the ligament.

In very painful or chronic cases, doctors will advise medication, physical therapy or extracorporeal shockwave therapy.

Surgery is required for three to five per cent of patients — only when the above treatments do not work and symptoms worsen. Post-surgery, the patient will be able to walk again with a support sandal within the day, and pain relief is experienced within one month of surgery.

This is not a lifelong condition, and people can usually recover within six to 18 months without treatment. However, recovery rates of up to 90 per cent can be achieved with six months of consistent treatment.

Above:

Plantar fasciitis sufferers usually experience pain around the heel but the condition can be treated by using supportive footwear or in very painful cases, through medication or physical therapy.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



## DR GOWREESON THEVENDRAN

consultant  
orthopaedic surgeon,  
Island Orthopaedics  
Mount Alvernia  
Hospital  
820 Thomson Road  
Medical Centre A  
#01-01/02  
Singapore 574623