

# DON'T LET HEEL PAIN SLOW YOU DOWN

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**Y**ou get out of bed in the morning and ouch! That heel pain you've felt before is even worse. After you walk around for a while, the pain dwindles to the dull ache that lasts for the rest of the day, every day, but again, you don't go to a podiatrist to find out how to ease the pain.

Sound like you? Difficulty in walking is a common problem, and a common reason is heel pain. Heel pain has a variety of causes, but the two causes we find most often are heel spurs and plantar fasciitis.

The plantar fascia is a broad, band of tissue (like a wide rubber band) that stretches along the bottom of the foot, connecting the heel to the toes. It supports your arch and acts as a shock absorber when you walk. The fascia can become stretched or even torn through stress or tension. When the fascia becomes inflamed – i.e., plantar fasciitis – your foot can hurt quite a lot, mostly near or on the heel. Risk factors for developing plantar fasciitis include overweight or obesity; standing on your feet at work on hard surfac-

es; wearing ill-fitting shoes that lack good arch support; having flat feet, a high arch, or an unusual gait; running, jogging or dancing on hard surfaces; age between 40 and 60.

A heel spur is a bone spur on the underside of the heel bone, a protrusion that extends forward and is visible on X-rays. A painful heel spur may be caused by muscle or ligament strain, stretching of the plantar fascia (yes, these conditions can be related!), or recurring tearing of the membrane that covers the heel bone. Risk factors for developing heel spurs include overweight or

obesity; wearing ill-fitting shoes that lack good arch support; running or jogging on hard surfaces; a biomechanical or gait abnormality. Sound familiar?

What can be done about either of these problems? See a podiatrist. A podiatrist can diagnose the source of the heel pain and then treat it with stretching exercises, use of orthotics (shoe inserts), taping and strapping, recommendations for appropriate shoes, anti-inflammatory medication and/or physical therapy. If gait abnormality is the cause of heel pain, a podiatrist can address that as well.



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