

If your heels or arches hurt you may have a condition called plantar fasciitis, the most common cause of heel pain. This occurs when small tears in a ligament in your foot cause it to become inflamed. The pain is usually worst when you get out of bed in the morning or stand up after sitting a while. The pain may become debilitating and can interfere with your ability to work, exercise or perform your normal activities.

What can you do about it?

Wear good supportive shoes. Your shoes should have a thick, rigid sole, bend only at the toes (not at the arch) and not easily twist in your hands. Most high-end cross trainers or running shoes have these features. Avoid wearing flip-flops, flimsy sandals, slippers or high heels.

Wear your shoes at home. Avoid going barefoot as much as possible until the condition improves. Keep your shoes by the bed so you can put them on as soon as you get up.

Avoid running on hard or uneven surfaces. Treadmills are easier on the feet than roads and sidewalks. You may also need to reduce your mileage until the condition improves or substitute running with a stair stepper, elliptical machine or stationary bicycle.

Stretch your calf muscles. Stretching your calves helps reduce the forces on your feet that can aggravate the problem. The "wall pushing stretch" is the safest and most effective. You can also stretch your calves before getting out of bed by putting a towel around your forefoot and pulling back on the ends.

Take an anti-inflammatory medication. Aspirin, Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or Naproxen (Aleve) are over the counter medications that can reduce the inflammation and pain. Be careful not to mix these medications or take more than the label allows. They can cause bleeding and stomach problems.

Ice the area. Fill up a paper cup with water and put it in the freezer. Massage the area for 20-30 minutes every night. You can also use an ice pack to cool the area and reduce the inflammation.

Lose excess weight. It's easier said than done, but carrying those extra pounds puts a great deal of stress on your feet.

If these steps don't take care of the problem, you may have a more serious problem. At Lake Erie Podiatry, we use state-of-the-art digital x-rays to look for spurs, arthritis, stress fractures or other bone problems in the feet and ankles. We use a wide array of treatments for heel pain to suit everyone and over 95% of our patients get better without surgery.