

Health Awareness

Heel Pain: What Everyone Should Know

(NAPS)—According to a recent survey from the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA), heel pain is the foot ailment that affects Americans most—16 percent of the population regularly experiences it. Fortunately, if detected early, heel pain can be successfully treated with noninvasive treatment options.

What Causes Heel Pain?

When you pound your feet on hard surfaces while playing sports or wear shoes that irritate sensitive tissues, you can develop heel pain. Many people try to ignore the early signs of heel pain and keep performing the activities that are causing the problem. But when you continue to use a sore heel, it will frequently get worse and could become a chronic condition, leading to more problems.

The most frequent cause of heel pain is plantar fasciitis. With this condition, too much running or jumping can lead to inflammation of the tissue band (fascia) connecting the heel bone to the base of the toes. The pain is generally centered under the heel; it may be mild at first, but tends to flare up when you take your first steps after resting overnight.

Plantar fasciitis is often successfully treated with custom orthotics, injections, prescription medications, physical therapy and immobilization. However, the longer you have untreated pain, the more difficult it is to find relief. Other possible causes of heel pain include:

- **Achilles Tendinitis.** This condition is often caused by tight calf muscles, bone spurs, age, injury and primary tendinitis. If left untreated, this can also develop into a more chronic problem called tendinosis, which involves muscle tearing, adhesions and scar tissue.



Left untreated, heel pain can become a chronic condition, leading to more complications.

- **Fat Pad Atrophy.** Age, obesity and walking on hard surfaces can all cause fat pad atrophy, which occurs primarily in women. Treatments for the condition may include soft insoles and soft-soled shoes prescribed by a podiatrist.

“Heel pain is generally the result of faulty biomechanics that place too much stress on the heel bone and the soft tissues that attach to it,” explains Dr. Ronald D. Jensen, APMA president. “If pain and other symptoms of inflammation—redness, swelling, heat—persist, you should limit normal daily activities and contact a podiatric physician immediately.”

Avoiding Heel Pain

To avoid heel pain, the APMA recommends wearing shoes that fit well, wearing the proper shoes for each activity, not wearing shoes with excessive or uneven worn heels or soles and stretching the heel before exercising.

To learn more, visit the APMA's Web site at www.apma.org/heelpain.