

It is estimated that more than 75 percent of Americans will experience foot problems of varying degrees of seriousness at one time in their lives. Dr. Aaron Siebeneck answers some questions about one of the most common complaints-Heel Pain. Dr. Siebeneck is a podiatrist and practices at the Capital Region Health Park • 711 Troy-Schenectady Road Suite 206 • Latham, NY. For more information or an appointment call 518-783-3110.

QUESTION: I know a number of people with pain in their heel. What is the cause?

Heel pain in one or both of the heels is one of the most common conditions that I treat. The pain is often worse when getting up in the morning (or after sitting for prolonged periods), causing discomfort and/or limping for a few minutes. As weight continues to be applied, the symptoms may improve or can continue.

The most common cause of heel pain is inflammation of a strong ligament consisting of connected tissue on the bottom of the foot, called the plantar fascia. The plantar fascia begins to pull on the heel bone (calcaneus) and the tissue becomes irritated or inflamed. Inflammation of the fascia is known as fasciitis and therefore the condition is known as plantar fasciitis.

QUESTION: If I have heel pain or plantar fasciitis do I have a heel spur?

Maybe. A projection or growth of bone, called a spur, can grow where the muscles and fascia attached to the heel bone. Some heel spurs are painless; others can be the cause of chronic heel pain that may require medical treatment or on occasion surgical intervention. A patient can have plantar fasciitis with or without a heel spur. A heel spur can be identified on an x-ray of your foot.

QUESTION: Are there any other medical conditions that can cause pain in my heel?

Other less likely causes of heel pain include gout, arthritis, psoriasis, collagen disorders, nerve injuries, heel bone abnormalities, and tumors. Illnesses and conditions like these and others must be diagnosed separately; and the treatment plan will include your primary care physician.

QUESTION: Is there anything that I can do to treat heel pain?

There are many options for the treatment of plantar fasciitis at home.

1. Take medications that contain Ibuprofen or Aspirin to decrease the inflammation. As you would with other medications, be aware of allergies or drug interactions and use as directed.
2. Ice the heel 2-3 times per day for 20-30 minutes • **caution:** People with diabetes mellitus or poor circulation should avoid ice or other cold treatment options

3. Limit or change your activity (i.e. riding a bike or swimming versus walking or running).
4. Wear a supportive pair of running or walking shoes and/or shoes with soft rubber heels.
5. If you're overweight, try to lose the weight.

QUESTION: How can a doctor help me if my pain persists?

A majority of patients will respond to conservative treatment. Most patients will not need surgical correction. Some of the non-surgical medical treatments include:

1. Prescription oral NSAIDs to reduce pain and inflammation
2. Cortisone injections
3. Foot taping or strapping to support and control the foot
4. Physical therapy
5. Night splints
6. Custom molded orthotics are the hallmark treatment. They are necessary in a majority of patients with heel pain. They are not only therapeutic, but will also help prevent recurrences.

If non-surgical or conservative treatments are exhausted and are unsuccessful, then surgical treatment may be necessary. Your physician will discuss in detail with you your treatment options and the surgical procedure if necessary.