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Adult Painful Flatfoot Posterior Tibial Tendon Dysfunction (PTTD)

Posterior tibial tendon dysfunction (PTTD) is an inflammation and/or overstretching of the posterior tibial tendon in the foot. An important function of the posterior tibial tendon is to help support the arch. But in PTTD, the tendon's ability to perform that job is impaired, often resulting in a flattening of the foot.

The posterior tibial tendon is a fibrous cord that extends from a muscle in the leg. It descends the leg and runs along the inside of the ankle, down the side of the foot, and into the arch. This tendon serves as one of the major supporting structures of the foot and helps the foot to function while walking.

PTTD is often called "adult-acquired flatfoot" because it is the most common type of flatfoot developed during adulthood. Although this condition typically occurs in only one foot, some people may develop it in both feet. PTTD is usually progressive, which means it will keep getting worse especially if it isn't treated early.

Treatment

If treated early enough, your symptoms may resolve without the need for surgery and progression of your condition can be arrested. In contrast, untreated PTTD could leave you with an extremely flat foot, painful arthritis in the foot and ankle, and increasing limitations on walking, running, or other activities.

In many cases of PTTD, treatment can begin with non-surgical approaches that may include:

Orthotic devices or bracing. To give your arch the support it needs, your foot and ankle surgeon may provide you with an ankle stirrup brace or a custom orthotic device that fits into the shoe.

Immobilization. Sometimes a short-leg cast or boot is worn to immobilize the foot and allow the tendon to heal, or you may need to completely avoid all weightbearing for a while.

Physical therapy. Ultrasound therapy and exercises may help rehabilitate the tendon and muscle following immobilization.

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Medications. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, help reduce the pain and inflammation.

When is Surgery Needed? In cases of PTTD that have progressed substantially or have failed to improve with non-surgical treatment, surgery may be required. For some advanced cases, surgery may be the only option. Surgical treatment may include repairing the tendon, realigning the bones of the foot, or both. The doctor will determine the best approach for your specific case.