



**MICHAEL J. BAKER, D.P.M.**

**JASON D. GRAY, D.P.M.**

**GREGORY W. BOAKE, D.P.M**

**JESSICA R TAULMAN, D.P.M**

### **BFS BUSINESS OFFICE**

P O BOX 330.  
Fortville, IN 46040-0330  
Tel 317.863.2556  
Fax 317.203.0420

### **COMMUNITY FOOT & ANKLE CENTER**

1221 Medical Arts Blvd.  
Anderson, IN 46011  
Tel 765.641.0001  
Fax 765.641.0003

### **EAST FOOT & ANKLE CENTER**

161B Washington Point Dr.  
Indianapolis, IN 46229  
Tel 317.898.6624  
Fax 317.898.6636

### **FOOT & ANKLE AT WESTVIEW HOSPITAL**

3520 Guion Rd., Ste 102  
Indianapolis, IN 46222  
Tel 317.920.3240  
Fax 317.920.3243

### **MARION FOOT CENTER**

330 N. Wabash Ave, Ste 460A  
Marion, IN 46952  
Tel 765.664.1413  
Fax 765.965.6530

### **BAKER FOOT SOLUTIONS SATILLITE FOOT CLINICS**

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Fax 317.920.3243

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Fax 317.898.6636

#### **NEW CASTLE**

Tel 765.664.1413  
Fax 765.965.6530

#### **SPEEDWAY**

Tel 317.920.3240  
Fax 317.920.3243

## **Heel Pain**

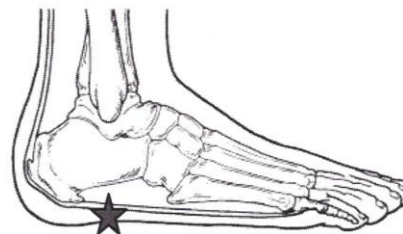
Heel pain is most often caused by plantar fasciitis- a condition that is sometimes also called heel spur syndrome when a spur is present. Heel pain may also be due to other causes, such as a stress fracture, tendonitis, arthritis, nerve irritation, or, rarely, a tumor.

Because there are several potential causes, it is important to have heel pain properly diagnosed. A podiatric foot and ankle surgeon is best trained to distinguish between all the possibilities and determine the underlying source of your heel pain.

### **What is Plantar Fasciitis?**

Plantar fasciitis is an inflammation of the band of tissue (plantar fascia) that extends from the heel to the toes. In this condition the fascia first becomes irritated and then inflamed – resulting in heel pain. The symptoms of plantar fasciitis are:

- Pain on the bottom of the heel
- Pain that is usually worse upon arising
- Pain that increases over a period of months



People with plantar fasciitis often describe the pain as worse when they get up in the morning or after they've been sitting for long periods of time. After a few minutes of walking the pain decreases, because walking stretches the fascia. For some people the pain subsides but returns after spending long periods of time on their feet.

### **Causes of Plantar Fasciitis**

The most common cause of plantar fasciitis relates to faulty structure of the foot. For example, people who have problems with their arches – either overly flat feet or high –arched feet – are more prone to developing plantar fasciitis. Wearing non-supportive footwear on hard, flat surfaces puts abnormal strain on the plantar fascia and can also lead to plantar fasciitis. This is particularly evident when a person's job requires long hours on their feet. Obesity also contributes to plantar fasciitis. Tightness in the Achilles tendon can also contribute.

### **Diagnosis**

To arrive at a diagnosis, the podiatric foot and ankle surgeon will obtain your medical history and examine your foot. Throughout this process the surgeon rules out all the possible causes for your heel pain other than plantar fasciitis. X-rays are commonly used to secure the diagnosis and assess the overall foot architecture.

## At Home Treatment Strategies

Treatment of plantar fasciitis begins with first-line strategies, which you can begin at home:

- *Stretching exercises.* Exercises that stretch out the calf muscles help ease pain and assist with recovery.
- *Avoid going barefoot.* When you walk without shoes, you put undue strain and stress on your plantar fascia.
- *Ice.* Putting an ice pack on your heel for 10 minutes several times a day helps reduce inflammation.
- *Limit activities.* Cut down on extended physical activities to give your heel a rest
- *Shoe modifications.* Wearing supportive shoes that have good arch support and a slightly raised heel reduces stress on the plantar fascia. Your shoes should provide a comfortable environment for the foot.
- *Medications.* Anti-inflammatory drugs may help reduce pain and inflammation
- *Lose weight.* Extra pounds put extra stress on your plantar fascia.

## Treatment by Your Physician

Although most patients with plantar fasciitis respond to non-surgical treatment, a small percentage of patients may require surgery. Your podiatric foot and ankle surgeon will discuss the surgical options with you and determine which approach would be most beneficial for you.

- *Padding and strapping.* Placing pads in the shoe softens the impact of walking. Strapping helps support the foot and reduce strain on the fascia.
- *Orthotic devices.* Custom orthotic devices that fit into your shoe help correct the underlying structural abnormalities causing the plantar fasciitis.
- *Injection therapy.* In some cases, corticosteroid injections are used to help reduce the inflammation and relieve pain.
- *Night splint.* Wearing a night splint allows you to maintain an extended stretch of the plantar fascia while sleeping. This may help reduce the morning pain experienced by some patients.
- *Physical therapy.* Exercises and other physical therapy measures may be used to help provide relief.
- *Closed surgery.* Extracorporeal Shock Wave Therapy (ESWT) used sound waves to stimulate the plantar fascia to heal itself. No incision is required.
- *Open surgery.* Operative release and lengthening of the tight plantar fascia. This requires an incision.

## Long-term Care

No matter what kind of treatment you undergo for plantar fasciitis, the underlying causes that led to this condition may remain. Therefore, you will need to continue with preventive measures. If you are overweight, it is important to reach and maintain an ideal weight. For all patients, wearing supportive shoes and using custom orthotic devices are the mainstay of long-term treatment for plantar fasciitis.

For more information please see:

heelspurs.com  
orthoinfo.aaos.org  
[www.emedicine.com](http://www.emedicine.com)

