

## Heel & Foot Pain Brian Kenney

I recently had a bout with a nasty little foot problem called plantar fasciitis and this is the mother of all heel pain let me tell you. I have a very close friend in the officiating world named Scott Doberstein, Head Athletic Trainer at UW La Crosse, whose brain I needed to pick to gain insight into this painful problem that led to unbearable pain. I also had a long road to recovery through intense physical therapy and I would like to extend a great thanks to the folks at New Life Physical Therapy for their innovative and functional approaches to treating me for over 2 years. I decided to share some of the information with readers of the Dells Events in an effort to help others who may be suffering from plantar fasciitis or other related foot problems, so they can seek the help they need quicker than I did. This will be extremely helpful to football coaches and their athletes. This is part 2 of an article I wrote over a year ago to conclude that the road to recovery can be long and involve physical and emotional pain.

What is plantar fasciitis?

The condition involves the plantar (bottom of the foot) and the fascia (tough like tendon that runs the length of the bottom of the foot). This structure provides significant support to the medial arch, the in-step, the toes and the heel. The more inflamed the fascia becomes the more the pain and tenderness will increase, making even simple activities difficult. Those individuals with tight calf muscles are particularly vulnerable to this problem. A large part of the recovery process being so difficult with plantar fasciitis is the compromised position of the foot/feet when sleeping and the painful routine of waking up in the morning. I have gotten up many mornings feeling like a newborn animal and I have had to hobble to the bathroom. I have since learned how to administer proper stretches and massages to minimize the pain. Stretching before getting out of bed is crucial.

The main issue with sleeping and waking is the degree of flexion in the feet when we sleep. The feet tend to be pointed (plantar flexed) and the result is shortening of the muscles and tendons of the foot. Once pressure is applied by getting up in the morning, the muscles resist lengthening and intense pain is often the result. This problem can become chronic and if left untreated can lead to calf problems, achilles problems, and even low back issues. Worst case scenario is a torn tendon or other more serious injuries that could result in a surgical procedure.

What are some of the warning signs and how can it be treated?

Plantar Fasciitis usually involves sharp pain on the bottom of the feet and the heels. It can occur unilaterally (one side of the body) or bilaterally (both sides). The condition will worsen so do not ignore the warning signs and get your local physical therapy clinic involved in helping train you. Ask them to take photos of you doing the stretches so you have a visual aide. This will also tell you how good of a PT you chose – good ones have digital cameras and technology for their clients. These PT folks have loads of information and are usually more than happy to help.

My plantar fasciitis was a result of my hip and ankle not being on the same wave length. The muscles of my hips and glutes were not helping to support, control and stabilize the ankle and the flattening of the foot. In turn, my plantar fascia took on the majority of the punishment and distribution of forces. I have been seeking ongoing physical therapy to help with this problem and they have provided me with great ideas to share with readers and with the athletes I coach.

Ice massaging and ankle stretches that allow for lengthening and shortening of the fascia are very helpful. Using a tennis ball or a golf ball can also help relieve the tension. You place one of these objects under your feet and put some weight onto it and begin to roll the ball around. In the morning I use a towel to pull back on the muscles under my feet and expose the fascia. This helps get the muscles from the shortened stage to the lengthened stage, prior to placing weight on my feet. When stretching, it is crucial to do the movements dynamically and to utilize the 3 planes of movement when doing them (sagittal, frontal and transverse).

If some of these remedies do not work you need to seek advice from a physical therapist, medical doctor/orthopedic doctor, or a podiatrist. The problem can last from weeks to months, so be sure to check for warning signs and do not think they will go away on their own.

Is there a certain age that is a target for plantar fasciitis?

Those individuals who are age 25 and up are more at risk than those who are under the age of 25. The natural aging process, coupled with the fact that the feet are involved in almost all areas of our lives and all of our movement. Student athletes in high school can begin to feel the onset of what could be long term problems if not addressed. Coaches need to kill the early problem by demanding a few basic things from their athletes:

- 1- Demand that kids tie their shoes in practice, speed workouts and in the weight room and that they wear athletic shoes. Too often kids forget that the weight room and other places of strength training are not casual environments and they need to be reminded of this. There is little or no ankle support in a casual shoe or a good shoe that is untied.
- 2- Be sure that you teach your athletes how to inspect their feet and let you as the coaches know when they may spot a foot related problem in the plantar fascia region or ankle. If they know ahead of time what bad is, they will likely let you know when bad happens.

How can I prevent plantar fasciitis from reoccurring?

There are several prevention strategies and long term the best thing to do is get orthodic devises in your shoes. Often insurance companies will pay for 1 pair per calendar year this depends on your plan and they all differ). Orthodics help put the foot and heel in proper position and relieve tension on the plantar region. Be very cautious about cortisone injections before you try other methods. These injections are very painful and tend to mask the pain without proactively helping the problem. Continuing with the stretching routine (discussed above) 2-3 times per day (especially mornings) is crucial to keeping flare up's from reoccurring.

I would like to thank the wonderful folks at New Life Physical Therapy in Portage and one my close friends Scott Doberstein for their time and help giving me the correct advise to help me with my foot problem. Sometimes we do not thank the medical folks around us enough for their diligence in helping us maintain a quality of life that lets us do the things we want to do.

Medical Disclaimer: All information in this article is of a general nature and is furnished for your knowledge and understanding only. This information is not to be taken as medical or other health advice pertaining to your specific health and medical condition. Always consult a physician or health professional before beginning any exercise or nutrition program or treating an injury.

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