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Understanding Plantar Fasciitis

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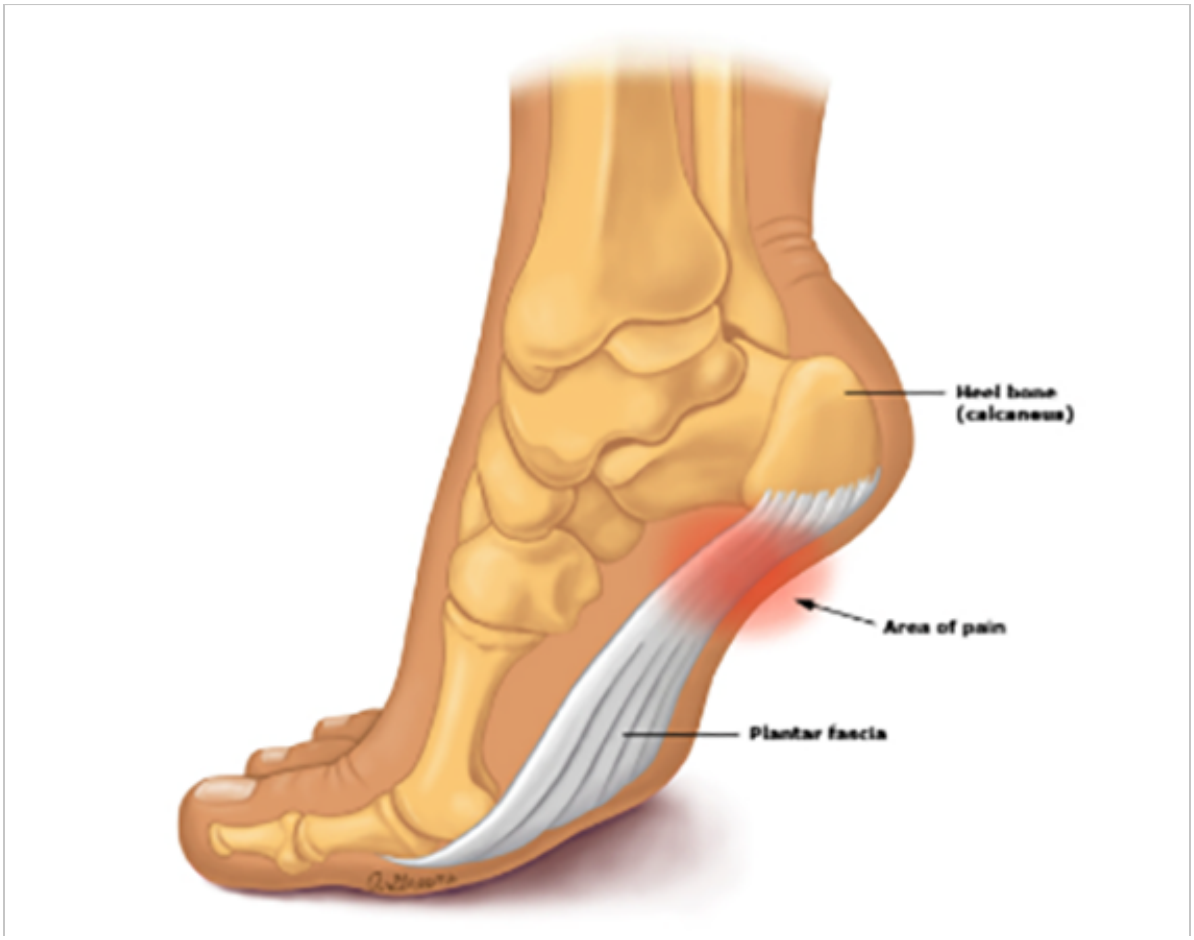

Understanding Plantar Fasciitis: Causes, Pain & Modern Treatment Options

What is Plantar Fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis, often called “plantar heel pain”, is one of the most common causes of heel discomfort. The plantar fascia is a thick band of connective tissue that runs from your heel to your toes, supporting the arch and absorbing impact when you walk or run.

Although it sounds inflammatory (“-itis”), research now shows it’s often a degenerative or overload condition, involving small micro-tears and collagen changes. That’s why treatment focuses on improving tissue health, load tolerance, and mechanics, not just rest.

Common Causes and Contributing Factors

Plantar fasciitis typically develops from repetitive strain over time rather than a single injury.

Risk factors include:

- Overuse or sudden increase in activity (new workout, standing all day, long walks)
- Poor foot mechanics: flat feet, high arches, or limited ankle mobility
- Tight calves or weak foot muscles
- Improper footwear or worn-out shoes
- Higher body weight increasing heel load
- Prolonged standing or walking on hard surfaces

What Pain Feels Like

- Sharp heel pain with first steps in the morning or after rest
- Pain that eases briefly with movement, then returns later in the day
- Tenderness near the inner heel
- Discomfort after long periods of standing or activity

Pain arises when the plantar fascia loses elasticity, causing micro-strain at its heel attachment.

Our Treatment Approach: Restoring Movement, Strength & Function

1. Early Stage: Reducing Load and Tissue Irritability

When you come for physical therapy in the early stages of plantar heel pain, we start with a focus on controlling irritation and allowing healing without total rest. Our goals are to reduce load, improve mobility, and stimulate gentle circulation to facilitate a reduction in pain and start the healing process.

We may use:

- Manual therapy and fascia-specific stretching for short-term pain relief
- Unloaded Total Gym work allows you to perform exercise at a reduced body weight to safely load the plantar fascia, calf, and foot muscles early in recovery without aggravating symptoms
- Targeted self mobilization techniques of the plantar fascia alongside strengthening the lower body chain in unloaded positions
- The AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill is a specialized machine that enables walking, jogging, and running at reduced body-weight percentages, promoting normal gait while decreasing strain on the fascia
- Vasopneumatic Compression Therapy is an intermittent air-pressure treatment provided to reduce swelling, improve circulation, and speed recovery
- Immobilization / Pressure Reduction by using a CAM boot for several weeks to allow time for your foot to cool off

We have additional cash-based services and modalities that may be offered to speed up the healing timeline:

- CureWave™ Cold Laser Therapy is available to stimulate tissue healing and circulation, and reducing inflammation of the injured tissue
- Dry Needling with Electrical Stimulation to relieve tension in the calf and foot muscles, improve blood flow, and decreases pain sensitivity
- Focused Shockwave Therapy (ESWT) for both acute and chronic or stubborn cases, which helps to break down scar tissue and triggers healing at the fascia attachment

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2. Mid Stage: Building Strength and Tissue Tolerance

As pain improves, the focus shifts to progressive loading and restoring stability through the lower leg and foot.
This stage includes:

- Targeted strengthening of intrinsic foot muscles, calf complex, and hip stabilizers in more upright positions
- Eccentric and isometric exercises for tissue remodeling using a combination of unloaded and loaded exercises
- Balance and proprioceptive training to improve foot control needed for walking and running over uneven terrain

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3. Later Stage: Return to Impact and Performance

Once baseline strength and mobility are restored, we guide patients through dynamic and sport-specific loading to ensure full, safe return to desired activities.
This includes:

- Dynamic Total Gym work – progressing to higher incline and resistance for controlled eccentric loading
- Targeted dynamic exercises such as single leg calf raises, hopping, lunging, and jumping progressions based on your specific goals
- AlterG treadmill for gradual reintroduction to walking, jogging, or running
- Functional movement retraining with a focus on mimicking job or sport demands
- Education on self-management for long term maintenance including footwear, pacing during walking or running, and a home program customized to your specific needs
- Footwear assessment and recommendations to ensure you are in the right shoes to avoid a return of symptoms

This phase is crucial for preventing recurrence and restoring full confidence in movement.

Typical Recovery Timeline

- 4–6 weeks for mild or early cases
- 8–12+ weeks for chronic or recurrent pain

Progress depends on duration, activity level, and tissue response. Your therapist will guide progression step-by-step, adjusting based on comfort and goals.

Key Takeaways

- Plantar fasciitis is common, treatable, and rarely permanent
- Addressing both pain relief and mechanical causes ensures lasting success
- Our clinic combines proven physical therapy techniques with advanced technology for faster recovery:
    - AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill
    - CureWave Cold Laser
    - Focused Shockwave Therapy
    - Dry Needling + E-Stim
    - Vasopneumatic Compression
    - Unloaded Total Gym Training

Step Into the Holidays Pain-Free!

Heel pain shouldn't slow you down this season. Let us help you get off on the right step for the holidays!

(Pictured: various images of our team members in their Halloween

costumes with clients)

We hope you had a safe and spooky October! We loved seeing some of our clients dressing up for their therapy sessions and our staff enjoyed getting involved as well.

New Graduate Highlight

(Pictured left to right: Dr. Hartley Bowman, Stacey)

Stacey came to LifeMotion after a pelvic surgery with the goal of getting back to her work as a Pilates instructor. She worked hard with therapy and is now back to full activity without limitation. You can find her around the Tulsa area teaching a variety of Pilates classes! Thank you for helping us get your life back in motion Stacey!

Google Reviews

"Given physical rehab is not always fun, my experiences at LifeMotion have been great. Great people, good equipment, and the PT's (most, if not all, with advanced degrees) work well together for the good of the clients. Unlike my experiences with other PT's in other clinical environments, at LifeMotion you're not just handed a worksheet, maybe get a brief demonstration, and then left to your own devices. This is hands-on and your PT is watching and correcting or changing

the activity as needed--and the PTs actively cooperate when needed to the benefit of all the clients. My daughter clued my wife and I in when she heard us wondering where to get better PT than we'd been getting and all three of us have been clients of LifeMotion and, if the need arises, will be again."

"Life Motion is like family. They all work well together and genuinely care about their patient's well being and achieving the best outcome for each patient. It is truly a unique place where you will find compassion and expertise."

A Message From Ryan

As I've entered my 50s this year, it seems each birthday brings the "privilege" of a new ache or pain. Today's topic of plantar fasciitis hits close to home - I'm living it right now, and I can confirm: it's NO FUN! Late summer, I overloaded my foot while exercising in shoes that were way too soft. Like most of us, I tried to ignore it and hoped it would vanish. No such luck—I ended up with a plantar fascial tear. BOO! But I'm finally doing the right things, and my foot is on the mend, thanks to the incredible team at LifeMotion. I'll keep you posted on my progress in future newsletters—yes, I *will* get back to running and golf!

Hard to believe, but Thanksgiving is here again. At LifeMotion, we have so much to be grateful for:

- 12 amazing clinicians
- 4 administrative rockstars
- 5 dedicated, hardworking technicians
- 2 awesome clinics

Nothing beats the moment a client holds up their graduate T-shirt and we cheer them on for a job well done. Thank you for trusting us with your care—we're honored every day.

We're thrilled to welcome Dr. Heather Kimzey, PT, DPT, and Alyson

Cramer, PTA, to our growing team. They bring a wealth of experience, and we can't wait to share their stories soon.

We've also invested in an exciting new tool: the Vald Dynamo+ Dynamometer / Inclinometer. This game-changer lets us objectively measure strength and motion across all body parts—and, most importantly, track progress over time with metrics we couldn't capture before. Just one more way we're bringing cutting-edge technology to you.

As always, whether it's you, a friend, or a family member facing orthopedic, pelvic, or balance challenges, the LifeMotion team is here to help. Let's keep moving—together!

Go to LifeMotion

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