

Plantar Fasciitis

Condition: Plantar fasciitis is the inflammation or degeneration of the plantar fascia, the thick, connective tissue that runs from the heel to the ball of the foot.

Background: The condition affects two million people every year and is the third most common injury of runners.

Risk Factors: Obesity and repetitive, weight-bearing activities, such as endurance running or occupations that require prolonged standing, can lead to tearing, swelling and pain of the plantar fascia. Tight heel cords or abnormalities of the foot, leg and ankle also increase risk.

History and Symptoms: Pain typically follows an increase in the amount or intensity of activity, or a change in walking surface or footwear. It occurs in the heel, mid-arch or ball of the foot, and is worse in the morning.

Physical Exam: Patients are evaluated for pain and tenderness along the plantar fascia. Ankle mobility may be limited due to a tight Achilles tendon, and it may be painful to stretch the foot. Limping to avoid pressure on the affected heel may cause hip or lower back pain.

Diagnostic Process: To diagnose plantar fasciitis, a physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physician will evaluate running form; flexibility and range of motion of a patient's lower limb joints; and tightness or weakness of calf, knee, hip or core muscles. physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physician will educate the patient about the various stages that the condition may present as well as provide a detailed and comprehensive tailored program for the person based on the individual needs of the person and their expectations. X-rays, bone scans, MRIs and ultrasound tests may indicate stress fractures, scar tissue, heel spurs and inflammation.

Rehab Management: Physical medicine and rehabilitation physicians will recommend a variety of treatments that include weight reduction, proper footwear, shoe inserts, orthotic and arch supports, taping, and night splints. Stretching the foot and ankle, massaging the area, and applying ice for 15-20 minute intervals also may relieve pain and promote healing. In some cases, ultrasound, corticosteroid injections and pain medication are recommended.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: Several sources are available about the importance of stretching, appropriate training levels and proper footwear. Education is important regarding pain management and activity levels as well as prognosis about outcomes of this condition tailored to each patient's individual needs. The condition will involve a comprehensive evaluation provided by a trained PM&R physician with expertise in this condition.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.