

Specific stretching exercises can relieve chronic heel pain symptoms and can keep patients out of the operating room.

Exercises that specifically stretch the plantar fascia can relieve heel pain caused by an inflammation of the sole (plantar surface) of the foot following an injury of the tough, ligament-like sheet of tissue (fascia) that extends from the heel bone to the base of the toes.

Although stretching has long been regarded as a vital ingredient in treating plantar fasciitis, recent research has indicated what kind of specific stretching is the most effective in reducing chronic heel pain.

In the study, patients were divided into two groups: Group A received instructions for a non-weight-bearing plantar fascia-stretching program, and Group B were taught a weight-bearing Achilles tendon-stretching regimen. After eight weeks of performing their respective exercises, Group A (plantar fascia stretch) reported greater improvement and satisfaction than those in Group B (Achilles tendon stretch).

Researchers, therefore, concluded that plantar fascia-stretching exercises are superior to the previously standard Achilles tendon-stretching exercises for relieving chronic heel pain. The timing of the stretching exercises, before taking the first step in the morning and prior to standing after prolonged sitting, is also very important since it is felt to limit the cycle of repetitive micro-tearing and inflammation occurring with those first painful steps. For these reasons, the researchers think the plantar fascia stretching program should be the stretching exercise emphasized during treatment, rather than the traditional Achilles tendon stretch.

Chronic heel pain (worse with first step in the morning) needs to be treated early in order to get patients back on their feet sooner. Stretching, although vital, must be used in conjunction with a specific treatment plan specific to your pathology. These may include shoe changes, inserts, icing and other anti-inflammatory modalities. Find out what the best course of treatment is for your heel pain and find out what kind of specific stretching is best for you. With a good treatment protocol and early intervention, surgery for heel pain can be avoided.