

Stretching for Foot Pain

A new stretch could help ease the pain associated with plantar fasciitis, a painful condition caused by excessive wear to the plantar fascia of the foot.

The pain usually is felt on the underside of the heel, and is often most intense with the first steps of the day. It is commonly associated with long periods of weight bearing. Obesity and sudden weight gain are also associated with this condition.

The stretch, developed by researchers at the University of Rochester Medical Center, targets the plantar fascia and has a 75 percent success rate in relieving pain and enabling patients to return to full activity in three to six months.

In the study, complete data sets were obtained from 66 patients. The two-year follow-up results showed marked improvement for all patients after implementation of the plantar fascia-stretching exercises, with an especially high rate of improvement for those in the original group treated with the Achilles tendon-stretching program. In contrast to the eight-week results, the two-year results showed no significant differences between the groups with regard to the worst pain or pain with first steps in the morning.

Descriptive analysis of the data showed that 92 percent of the patients reported total satisfaction or satisfaction with minor reservations. Fifty-one patients or 77 percent reported no limitation in recreational activities and 62 patients or 94 percent reported a decrease in pain. Only 16 of the 66 patients reported the need to seek treatment by a clinician.

Researchers concluded that the tissue-specific plantar fascia-stretching protocol may be a key component for the treatment for chronic plantar fasciitis. Long-term benefits of the stretch may include a marked decrease in pain and functional limitations and a high rate of satisfaction.

Reference: 1) Digiovanni BF, Nawoczenski DA, Malay DP, et al. Plantar Fascia-Specific Stretching Exercise Improves Outcomes in Patients with Chronic Plantar Fasciitis. *The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (American)*. 2006;88:1775-1781.