

Plantar Fasciitis Relief Guide

By Gretchen Reynolds; The New York Times



If you have stairs or a sturdy box in your home and a backpack, timely relief for plantar fasciitis may be possible, according to a new study of low-tech treatment for the condition.

Plantar fasciitis, the heel pain caused by irritation of the connective tissue on the bottom of the foot, can be lingering and intractable. A recent study of novice runners found that those who developed plantar fasciitis generally required at least five months to recover, and some remained sidelined for a year or more.

Until recently, first-line treatment involved stretching and anti-inflammatory painkillers such as ibuprofen or cortisone. But many scientists now believe that anti-inflammatories are unwarranted, because the condition involves little inflammation. Stretching is still commonly recommended.

But the new study, published in August in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, finds that a single exercise could be even more effective.

It requires standing barefoot on the affected leg on a stair or box, with a rolled-up towel resting beneath the toes of the sore foot and the heel extending over the edge of the stair or box. The unaffected leg should hang free, bent slightly at the knee.

Then slowly raise and lower the affected heel to a count of three seconds up, two seconds at the top and three seconds down. In the study, once participants could complete 12 repetitions fairly easily, volunteers donned a backpack stuffed with books to add weight. The volunteers performed eight to 12 repetitions of the exercise every other day.

Other volunteers completed a standard plantar fasciitis stretching regimen, in which they pulled their toes toward their shins 10 times, three times a day.

After three months, those in the exercise group reported vast improvements. Their pain and disability had declined significantly. Those who did standard stretches, on the other hand, showed little improvement after three months, although, with a further nine months of stretching, most reported pain relief.

The upshot, said Michael Skovdal Rathleff, a researcher at Aalborg University in Denmark, who led the study, is that there was "a quicker reduction in pain" with the exercise program, and a reminder of how books, in unexpected ways, can help us heal.

Notes
