



Suffolk Podiatry

Heel Pain

Why is stretching recommended for heel pain?

Pain under the heel or arch is often linked to irritation of the plantar fascia, a strong band of tissue that supports the arch of your foot. Massaging and stretching are an effective way of managing heel pain.

The plantar fascia is a length of connective tissue that runs from the heel bone (called the calcaneus), spreading out like a fan towards the metatarsal heads (where the toes connect to the rest of the foot).

Heel pain often improves gradually over several weeks or months. Consistent daily stretching and supportive footwear is important.

General advice for stretching

Stretch at least once a day:

- Setting phone reminders can be helpful
- Stretching more than once a day is beneficial

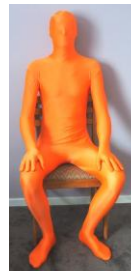
Try the plantar fascia stretch before standing to reduce the initial start-up pain.

Make sure to repeat the stretch for both feet.

Start your stretch slowly and hold the position – do not bounce the stretch.

Stretching the Plantar Fascia

Step 1) – Sit in a comfortable position with both feet on the ground.



Step 2) – Cross your leg over your other knee.

Step 3) – Hold the base of the toes with your hand and pull the toes back towards the shin.

Step 4) – Working from the heel towards your toes, gently massage the sole of your foot, from heel to toe.

Hold this stretch for **10 seconds** and repeat for **a total of three times**.



What can I do if I cannot reach my feet?

If you find it challenging to reach your feet, you may benefit from trying an alternative method of massaging and stretching the plantar fascia:

Using a wall

- 1) Stand close to the wall, with the toes up against the wall.
- 2) Slowly apply pressure until the toes are being pushed back and up towards your shin.
- 3) Hold this stretch for **30-40 seconds** and then repeat on the other foot.



Using a roller

Many different types of foot roller are available. You can also use a golf ball, tennis ball, or even a drinks bottle filled with hot water or ice (wrapped in a tea towel).

- 1) Sit in a comfortable chair, place the roller on the floor in front of you.
- 2) Gently roll your foot backwards and forwards on the roller for **30-40 seconds**, applying moderate pressure, but not so much as to cause pain.
- 3) **Repeat 2-3 times** on both feet.



IMPORTANT: Although any stretching can be uncomfortable, it should never be painful. If you feel any pain (especially sharp pain), it may indicate that you are pushing too hard. Try to ease into the stretch rather than forcing it.

Further advice:

Stretching the plantar fascia is only a small part of a good treatment plan for heel pain.

Stretching works best when combined with the following:

- 1) Regularly stretch the calf muscle (see our leaflet "calf muscle stretching" available on our website)
- 2) Wear an over-the-counter insole to support and cushion your foot (see our leaflet "Buying insoles to help your foot pain")
- 3) Supportive shoes with a firm sole and cushioned heel are usually more comfortable than flat or unsupportive footwear. Footwear advice is available on our website, or you can watch our video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qKh9kiBPjM>
- 4) Avoid prolonged barefoot walking, especially on hard floors.
- 5) Reducing excess pressure on the feet, including through weight management where appropriate, may help improve symptoms. Feel Good Suffolk offers support for a range of lifestyle changes <https://feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk/>

If after 6 months the pain has still not improved, despite following this stretching advice and using a supportive insole, you could consider seeing a private podiatrist or physiotherapist.

We recommend that any podiatrist or physiotherapist you see is registered with the HCPC. You can check their registration details by going to: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/>