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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Pain In Your Heels?

Do you wake up in the morning with your feet feeling fine until you step out of bed and take those first few steps? Is it then that you feel a sharp pain at the underside of your foot or heel that may decrease or even disappear after walking for a few minutes? Does it seem to get worse if you are standing or walking for long periods of time, particularly if you are not wearing shoes? If this sounds anything like you, you may have the most common problem that affects the feet - "plantar fasciitis".

The plantar fascia is a strong ligament-like structure that attaches to the heel and courses along the arch of the foot, inserting into the base of the toes. The plantar fascia helps to maintain and support the arch at the bottom of the foot. With every step, this ligament-like structure tenses and then relaxes.

It has been estimated that a 150-pound person walking one mile places approximately 60 tons of force through each foot. Keeping in mind how the plantar fascia helps to support the foot, it is not difficult to understand how it can become inflamed and sore after prolonged walking, running, or standing on hard floors. The area of the plantar fascia that becomes inflamed is often where it attaches to the heel. Therefore, the pain is most often felt just in front of the heel bone on the bottom surface of the foot. If this attachment site undergoes numerous bouts of inflammation, a heel spur may form on the front of the heel bone. This can be seen on x-ray but is not necessarily the cause of the pain that you feel. For example, many people without pain in their heel or bottom of the foot have had their feet x-rayed and heel spurs have shown up.

Treatment of plantar fasciitis is not always easy. If the many joints of the foot are not moving well, excessive stress can occur on the plantar fascia. This can be corrected by doing a series of chiropractic adjustments or manipulation of the joints in the foot to restore their mobility. Use of electrical current or ultrasound may accelerate the healing process. I recommend applying ice to the front part of the heel at the bottom of the foot for fifteen minutes, a few times per day. It is important to correct any biomechanical problems with the feet, such as "fallen arches" or "flat feet". I do this by making a "custom orthotic" to wear in your shoes. If you have these made, be sure they are a "custom orthotic" and not an imitation. This will help support and maintain the arch of your foot. Anti-inflammatory medications may help relieve the inflammation but you

should not just keep taking them without trying to identify why the plantar fascia became sore in the first place.

There are other things you may wish to consider trying at home in conjunction with professional treatment to eliminate plantar fasciitis. First, lose those extra pounds since they just compound the forces applied to your feet. Second, try participating in activities that do not put too much pressure on your feet, such as swimming or bicycling instead of running or basketball. Third, repetitively rolling a tennis ball under your foot to massage the plantar fascia is beneficial. If you have any further questions, please email (drgage@telus.net) or call me at my office.