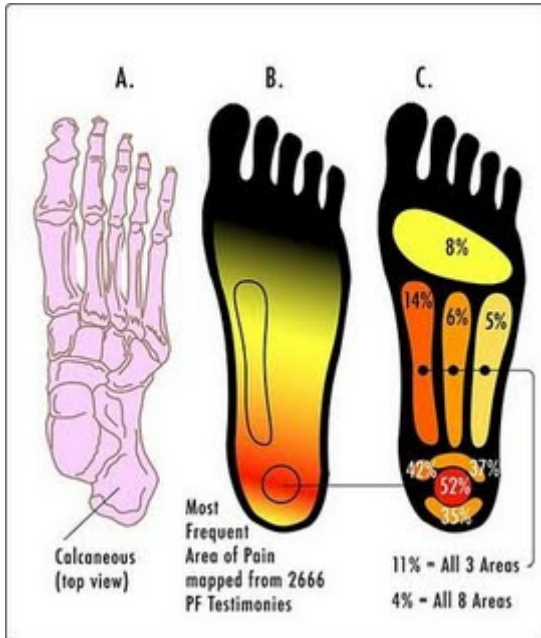


Pete's Home Remedies: Plantar Fasciitis - easy exercises to prevent, manage, and relieve its symptoms



From March until August of 2005, I kept a crutch at my bedside. That way, when I woke up in the morning, I didn't have to crawl to the bathroom. Plantar fasciitis is nasty, and it's a bane of us older runners.

The plantar fascia runs from our heel, along our arch, to our toes. Plantar fasciitis can be felt as pain in the heel (often mistaken in the early stages for a heel bruise), as pain where the heel meets the arch, or as pain along the arch - or even throughout the foot. And left untreated, it can linger for months ... *or years*.

Not sure if you've got it? Okay, here's what you do. Take your opposite thumb to the inside front part of the heel - right where it begins to slope into the arch - and dig in hard. If your scream wakes the neighbors, *congratulations*, you've got PF.

OKAY, STOP RIGHT HERE: If your PF pain came on suddenly during a very recent run, you need to stop running right now. Forget about the exercises below. Take a week off. Or two. If you've got a tear, you don't want to risk injuring it further. *Because trust me, this is one injury that just won't go away!*

If you're still reading this, then I'm guessing that means you've had your PF for awhile. I had mine for two years. Raise your hand if you tried rolling your foot over a golf ball? Over a ice cold can of Coke? If you wore a "night sock" to keep the fascia stretched? If you tried taping? And RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation)? And anti-inflammatories? And prayer? ... And when prayer didn't work - cussing? Because I tried it all. And none of it worked. And I decided, *forget it, I don't need this!*, and I threw my running shoes in the trash - hadn't used them for months anyway. *Sheesh, after all that time off, my legs*

probably wouldn't work right anymore anyway ...

And that's when it came to me, right then, like a bolt of lightning: *maybe my plantar fasciitis isn't an injury, maybe it's a symptom of a foot, ankle, and lower leg that simply aren't working properly.* I did a little research, cobbled together the simple exercises you're about to review, and I was running 7 days a week the *very next week.*

And it wasn't just me. I passed on the exercises to Rich Burns (see his Event Training entry for 1500 meters on this blog), who had terrible PF. And they worked for him. And when Tom Dalton, a 5-time USATF Masters X-Country Runner of the Year complained about his PF, well, the exercises did the trick for him too. All in all, I've been teaching these exercises as a cure for PF for 3-1/2 years now. About 50% of the people I've taught had a full recovery. Another 25% got some relief from the pain. And the final 25% got nothing - *sorry.*

Here's hoping you'll be in that 50% ...

EXERCISE 1: TOWEL TOE CURLS



1. Sit barefooted in a chair with a towel spread on the floor in front of you (like David Olds in the photo at the right).
2. Using your toes, drag the towel toward you, arching your foot until you've reeled in the entire towel (just slide the towel behind your heels as it bunches beneath your arch).
3. Do the whole towel 2 or 3 times.

Hint: Remember that this isn't a competition! Don't curl too hard or too fast. Also, setting a shoe on the far end of the towel prevents the towel from rebounding with each toe curl.

EXERCISE 2: FOOT ORBITS, FOOT GAS PEDALS, & FOOT ALPHABET

1. Use 1 of the 2 positions modeled by masters runner Grace Padilla. Either lie on the floor, one leg flat, toes pointed up, with the opposite leg raised, bent 90 degrees at the knee (and propped by your hands). Or else lie with one knee bent, foot flat on the floor, and the other knee drawn towards you and held just below the



kneecap.

2. Perform 1 or 2 of these 3 exercises:

- Foot Orbits - Rotate each foot clockwise and then counterclockwise 20-30 times.
- Foot Gas Pedals - Point and flex each foot 20-30 times.
- Foot Alphabet - Draw the letters of the alphabet with each foot.



Hint: Hold the knee immobile.

Limit motion to the ankle and foot.

EXERCISE 3: BEACH TOWEL CALVES

1. Lying on your back with one knee bent, foot flat on the floor, and the other leg raised and straightened with thighs parallel, hook a rolled beach towel around your forefoot and gently pull back your toes.



2. Hold for 30 seconds, then repeat with the opposite leg

Hint: Flex the raised thigh for maximum release (and flexibility) in the calf. Don't force this stretch! It's about loosening the calf, not stretching it like taffy.

EXERCISE 4: BEACH TOWEL HAMSTRINGS



1. Lying on your back with one knee bent, foot flat on the floor, and the other knee raised and straightened, hook your rolled beach towel around your arch and pull the leg vertically, while pulling back gently on the foot.

2. Hold for 30 seconds, then repeat with the opposite leg

Hint: Only pull the raised leg to your natural - and comfortable - limit of flexibility.

And guess what? ... That's it!

Do these exercises every day after you run - *before* you run if you're suffering from PF right now and need some relief just to get out the door. And do them every day for a couple weeks. And then make them part of your regular post-run routine.