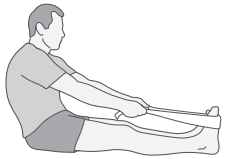
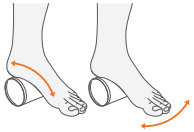
## Simple exercises



### Achilles tendon and plantar fascia stretch

Loop a towel around the ball of your foot and pull your toes towards your body, keeping your knee straight. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each foot.



### Plantar fascia stretch

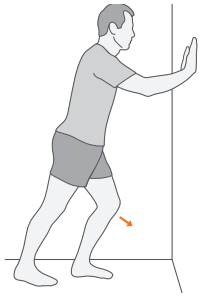
Sit down and rest the arch of your foot on a round object (e.g. a tin of beans). Roll the arch in all directions for a few minutes. Repeat this exercise at least twice daily.

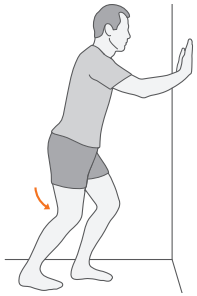
### Towel pickup

Sit down with a towel on the floor in front of you. Keeping your heel on the ground, pick up the towel by scrunching it between your toes. Repeat 10–20 times. As you improve, add a small weight such as a tin of beans to the towel.

### Sitting plantar fascia stretch

Sit down and cross one foot over your other knee. Grab the base of your toes and pull them back towards your body until you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold for 15–20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.





### Wall push

**a)** Facing a wall, put both hands on the wall at shoulder height and place one foot in front of the other. The front foot should be approximately 30 cm (12 inches) from the wall. With the front knee bent and the back knee straight, bend the front knee towards the wall until the calf in your back leg feels tight. Relax and repeat 10 times.

**b)** Repeat a) but bring the back foot forward a little so that the back knee is slightly bent. Repeat the 10 times.

## Summary

- The foot can be affected by many different conditions. Two causes of foot pain are plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendinitis.
- Finding comfortable footwear and using insoles if needed can help with symptoms.
- You can take painkillers to ease pain. Taking them before exercise can help you stay active without causing extra pain.
- Try the exercises suggested here to help ease pain and prevent future injuries.
- Your pain should ease within 2 weeks and you should recover over approximately a 4–6 week period.



Arthritis Research UK

# Foot pain

**This leaflet provides general information about foot pain and simple exercises that may help.**

in association with

CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

## How does the foot work?

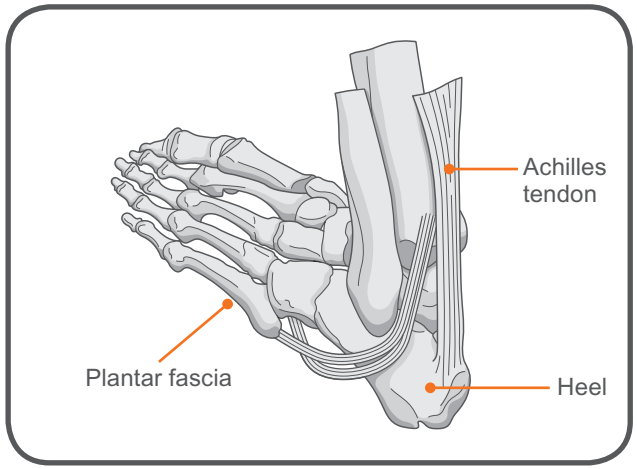
The feet are made up of 26 bones and more than 33 joints arranged in columns and arches that vary in stiffness and flexibility.

**The back of the foot** is made up of the heel bone and the ankle. The joint that holds them together allows the foot to move from side to side. The heel is connected to the calf muscles in the lower leg by the Achilles tendon, which is the most important tendon for movement.

**The middle of the foot** is made up of five bones. These form the arch of the foot. These bones are connected to the front and back of the foot by muscles and the arch ligament (the plantar fascia). They act as a shock absorber when we're walking or running.

**The front of the foot** is made up of the toe bones, which are connected to five long bones by joints. The joints in the toes don't move very much.

**The structure of the foot**




## What can cause foot pain?

There are many different causes of foot pain, but the following are two common conditions:

### Plantar fasciitis

Plantar fasciitis is inflammation at the site where the fascia (a tough band of fibrous tissue) attaches under the heel bone. It's the most common cause of discomfort around this area.

Plantar fasciitis frequently affects people with inflammatory arthritis but it can also occur in people without arthritis. Research has shown that plantar fasciitis is sometimes caused by the shortening of the Achilles tendon and that exercises to lengthen it may help.

### Achilles tendinitis

Achilles tendinitis is an inflammation of the Achilles tendon at the back of the ankle. It can occur as an over-use injury in people who take part in excessive exercise or exercise that they're not used to, but it's also quite common in people who have some types of arthritis.

## What can be done to help?

If your foot pain has a particular cause, like arthritis, treating that condition may help. There are several ways you can help yourself if you have foot pain, and most symptoms will be eased by finding footwear that has more room and is more comfortable. Using padded insoles that support the arch of the foot can also help.

### Medication

Painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen may help and you should use them if you need to. It's important that you take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue exercising. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers. You can also rub anti-inflammatory cream directly onto the painful area.

You shouldn't take ibuprofen or aspirin if you're pregnant or have asthma, indigestion or an ulcer until you've spoken to your doctor or pharmacist. Medication can have side-effects so you should read the label carefully and check with your pharmacist if you have any queries.

Your doctor or specialist physiotherapist can give you a steroid injection to reduce swelling, but it's recommended that you try other treatments first.

### Exercise

Exercise can help ease your symptoms and keep you to a healthy weight, which will help ease the pressure on painful feet. Swimming and other non-weight-bearing exercises are best if painful feet make it difficult to exercise.

### Physiotherapy and podiatry

If your foot pain is affecting your activity and is persisting, ask your GP about referral to a physiotherapist or podiatrist. They can help you to manage pain and improve your strength and flexibility. They can also provide a variety of treatments, help you understand your problem and get you back to your normal activities.