

2 in the “What Else is Going On Here?” Series

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Heel Pain

One of the most common causes of heel pain is plantar fasciitis and it can be quite debilitating. It happens when the plantar fascia where it attaches at the heel gets inflamed. The plantar fascia is a fibrous membrane on the sole of the foot that helps support the muscles and tendons of the foot. Sometimes there does not seem to be any precipitating cause or sometimes you can get it after wearing different or new footwear or after walking or running longer than usual. The typical symptoms are heel pain worse when first getting out of bed, a little better as you move around and then again getting worse the more you walk using the heel.

Heel pain can also be caused by other physical problems such as from the low back. A physical therapist can help find the biomechanical cause for you.

Physical Therapy Treatment

The physical treatment for plantar fasciitis is first looking at any biomechanical abnormalities of the foot, leg and back. Wearing a shoe with a heel takes the slack off the fascia and so does wearing an insole with an arch support. It stops the plantar fascia from getting aggravated and gives it a chance to heal. A good running shoe may do the trick. No walking bare footed, especially when getting out of bed.

Some health care practitioners have advocated stretching of the calf but in my experience this does not help and can make the condition worse. I advise no stretching until the pain has settled down. Mobilization of the foot and/or deep massage over the heel may also help.

Acupuncture perspective on heel pain

Acupuncture is very helpful in promoting healing. The Chinese discovered lines of energy (known as meridians) in the body. If the energy is low and/or not flowing well you get pain or disease. Putting needles at certain points on these meridians will get the energy flowing again. In Western medicine we discovered that needling will stimulate endorphin release. Endorphins are the body's natural pain relievers and also have anti-inflammatory properties. Stimulating the Kidney, Chong Mai and/or Liver meridians may help heel pain. Stimulating the Kidney meridian at the ankle will stimulate the nerves going to the heel. The Chong Mai meridian has a little offshoot to the heel and stimulating the Liver meridian is good for all ligaments of the body.

Can emotional issues contribute?

Some experts believe that we get physical symptoms because of a build up from unresolved emotional issues. Picture a garbage can filling up with mental “stuff” – when it starts overflowing that is when we get physical symptoms. A physical change or trauma (such as wearing new shoes in the case of heel pain) may be all that is needed to get that garbage can to overflow. If that garbage can were not filled to begin with, maybe there would be no physical consequences...

How can we discover what the emotional issues are?

The Indians discovered seven main energy centers of the body called Chakras. The heel is associated with the first Chakra. The first Chakra is called the Root Chakra because it is associated with your roots or your family (parents, siblings, children). Interestingly, the Chong Mai meridian in Chinese medicine is important for the reproductive organs. Decreased energy in the Kidney meridian is associated with fear. Decreased Liver meridian energy is associated with anger. The Chinese and Indian traditions do not separate the mind and the body.

Do you fear you cannot move forward without support from your family?
Are you fearful you will lose the support of your family if you go against family traditions? Are you angry with your family or a family member?

Examples of patients who have had plantar fasciitis:

- an elderly man whose last sibling had just died;
- a mother who was having trouble dealing with an adult daughter who was living with a man who was of a different religion;
- a mother struggling to raise a difficult son herself;
- a woman who was frustrated with her sister's behavior;
- an adult daughter who had just moved back in with her parents.

Treatment for emotional issues starts with getting insight into the problem. Neuro-Linguistic Programming is one form of treatment that helps resolve emotional issues. Using acupuncture to stimulate the Kidney meridian will promote courage and stimulating the Liver meridian will promote tolerance.

Think Outside the Box for Health Problems

In my experience, combining physical therapy, acupuncture and addressing emotional issues, works wonders in helping to heal a patient who has heel pain.

About the Author

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