

# **A Pain in the Foot**

*Brightside January, 2017*

*By Dr. Derek Conte*

One of the most important parts of the body, and possibly the most ignored, are our feet. Maybe it is because the feet are usually out of view or because they are not considered “vital organs” that we don’t properly care for them. By care I don’t mean merely clipping and painting the nails or even shaving down calluses and moisturizing. These things are fine for superficial care, but the feet are much more than skin and nails. In the Marine Corps, we were always told to take care of our feet. To keep them clean, warm and dry, so as to avoid “trench foot”, “frostbite” and infection, any of which can stop a person’s effectiveness dramatically. I saw this first hand during long, rainy maneuvers in young recruits who did not heed the warning of foot care. Trench foot is an ugly and painful thing.

Each foot is complex with 26 bones, numerous muscles, tendons, ligaments, arteries, veins, lymphatic vessels and a very misunderstood type of connective tissue called *fascia*. The *plantar fascia* is a very tough membrane that surrounds cushions and protects the muscles at the bottom of the feet and runs from the bottom of the heel to the base of the toes just deep to the soles of the feet. This area is particularly vulnerable to neglect and the pounding of daily activities and can form *adhesions* (tiny areas of scar tissue) causing tightness and great pain. This condition is known as “*plantar fasciitis*”, and affects millions of people. It may be difficult to walk even short distances without cramping or even stand upright in the morning on bathroom tile when brushing your teeth.

The typical medical treatments may include anti-inflammatory pills, cortisone shots, high-energy ultrasonic blasts or even a surgical “release” of the plantar fascia by cutting a small diamond-shaped opening in the fascia to allow it to lengthen, reducing the stress. But there is a less invasive approach to reduce pain and restore natural suppleness to the feet.

The simplest do-it-yourself way of breaking up adhesions in the feet is to roll a tennis ball under the feet and gently working out the tight and painful areas, eventually graduating to a smaller, firmer type of ball. Rolling a frozen water bottle under foot can help on days when the pain is too much and can be done before the balls are used. Better still would be to seek help from a good massage therapist who will be able to detect problem areas and manually release the foot.

Seeking a chiropractor’s advice would be very valuable and he or she would be able to adjust the body and coordinate the entire treatment. The results are usually excellent and drugs or surgery may be avoided. Once the pain is gone, a regimen stretching, massage and adjustment of the feet should keep the pain away for good and provide a better foundation for all your activities.

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