

Step by Step: Self-Care for Plantar Fasciitis and Achilles Tendonitis



Plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendonitis are different effects of the same problems, involving a chain of tissue from your thigh to your toes.

This string of structures works as a unit. A problem anywhere in the chain slacks or pulls on everything else. The most stressed or most vulnerable part is the one that will hurt.

Severe pain often obscures the true problem. That's true in families, workplaces, and cultures, and the body. Good health requires attention to the conditions that create or sustain distress.

Here are some guiding ideas. If you want, skim to the end for a list of things to do and a look at the demonstration video.

- In my field we say "the doctor who treats the site of pain is lost." Avoid the site(s) where you have acute pain. Those spots are the alarms, not the problem sites. Focus on spots that are stiff, but not painful, and strengthen weak spots. Release non-acute tight spots under the foot with a ball.
- Your muscles are your friends. Treat them aggressively and they will end up tightening. Release them, and they can change. Try the stretches in the attached video.
- Tendons and fascia change texture depending on temperature. They cool and harden when you sleep; they heat and soften when you're active.
- For pain relief, reduce extremes of heat and cold on any structures. For healing, increase both heat and cold while the structures aren't in use.
- Releasing the calf muscle is the easiest way to address Achilles tendonitis and plantar fasciitis.
- Remember, if pain in a muscle makes you wince, there's no gain. You're training your nervous system to let go, and you can't do that when you're fighting with pain. Do less, get more.
- Heat and ice tend to have similar effects. Heat brings nutrients and speeds chemical reactions of healing. Cold takes toxins away and make space for nutrients to get to the tissue. Both cold and heat break muscle spasms and relieve pain. As you know, warmth tends to soothe and ice to numb. At the beginning of the day and before activity, heat the tissues. After activity or at the end of the day, cool them.
- Stand up. Look down. You should see at least a hint of the knuckles above the ball of your foot. If you don't, or if you see a dip there, your toes are out of alignment, and that puts the chain at risk.
- Find tight points on the sole of your foot that are not acutely painful and release them.
- Taping can be helpful to support loose structures and relieve stress and pain.

Things You Can Do:

1. First thing in the morning, soak your feet and your calf in the hottest water you can stand for 10 minutes.
2. Before activity, heat to foot and calf, after activity, ice. As a response to acute pain, warm muscles and cool tendons and fascia.
3. Wear an approximately 1-inch heel whenever you can, including while you're at home.
4. Aim at tight SPOTS and joints in your calf and plantar fascia with stretching or a ball. Be careful if you use a roller. Mindless or general stretching tends to drive the stretch into the parts that don't need a stretch, leaving the problem parts unaddressed. If the stretch goes into the acutely painful places, adjust it so it doesn't. The acutely painful area is bearing the brunt of a problem elsewhere. Don't make it suffer any more.
5. Strengthen your foot muscles.
6. "No pain, no gain" approaches mostly empower the problem. If you wouldn't do it to a child, don't do it to yourself.
7. Taping. There are ways to tape your foot to reduce pain and speed healing - but I can't teach them in a video; you need to learn them in person. Come see me to get taped and learn to tape yourself.

Here's the [video](https://vimeo.com/311263180/cbeec8b271). Let me know how it goes!

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