



# Painful Flat Foot

How you should be involved in decisions about your healthcare and treatment.



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## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients requiring information on how to manage a painful flat foot, which is typically pain around the arch and ankle area and may result in a change of foot shape.

## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet will provide you with the required information to help you decide whether you can self-manage your painful flat foot or whether to seek support or further treatment from an Allied Health Professional, e.g. Podiatrist or Physiotherapist or Orthotist.

## What is a painful flat foot?

Painful flat foot is a general term used to describe pain within the soft tissue structures of the foot, particularly at the underside of the arch and around the inside of the ankle. The main structure which is commonly affected is the posterior tibialis tendon; the muscle comes from the back of the lower leg and the tendon runs along the inside of the ankle and inserts into the arch of the foot.

Other soft tissue structures which can be affected include the spring ligament, tibialis anterior tendon and the plantar fascia. These structures may become symptomatic in response to a change of load or a change of environment, e.g. changes in your activities, weight, footwear or training. The foot or arch can appear to drop or flatten as a result.

## What are the symptoms?

There is usually a gradual onset of symptoms most commonly felt along the inside of the arch or ankle areas. Symptoms can also spread upwards into the lower leg or towards the outside of the ankle. Symptoms are typically worst with activity. It may be difficult for you to go on to your tip toes on the affected foot and you may notice a change in the shape of your foot.



## Do I need imaging?

Clinical presentation is sufficient to assess and diagnose this condition therefore imaging is not typically required in order to form a conservative management plan. Soft tissue imaging including ultrasound or MRI may be indicated if there is uncertainty about the integrity of the soft tissue structures. X-ray may be indicated if there is suspected joint or bone involvement in more persistent cases. It is important you understand that imaging is used to guide clinicians with an appropriate management plan and if the results of the image would not change the treatment plan then imaging is not required.

## How can it be treated?

There are a number of options available to help you manage this condition and your symptoms. These are typically non- surgical and can be split into two categories to;

- **Improve tissue tolerance**
- **Pain management**



**Poor footwear can be a cause of Painful Flat Foot.**



## Improving tissue tolerance:

**Suitable Footwear:** Wear a supportive shoe with a cushioned sole. Avoid flat or slip on shoe styles and avoid walking in your bare feet.

**Weight management:** Lowering your body weight can be very effective at reducing the load going through your foot and lower leg.

**Strengthening Exercises:** Consistent and progressive strengthening exercises for the foot and leg muscles have been proven to help symptoms. These exercises include resistance exercises, tip toe exercises and foot muscle exercises.

**Stretching exercises:** If there is tightness in your calf muscle regular stretching techniques can help to improve flexibility.



**Taping / strapping:** Taping may be used in early stages to support the painful soft tissue structures. This tends to be used in the short term only (<28 days). Simple straps can be self-bought.

**Insoles:** Insoles may be used longer term for more persistent cases. Insoles can be used to alter forces and offload specific structures. Simple arch supports can be self-bought. Prescriptive insoles may be provided by your Podiatrist or Orthotist.

**Braces:** Supportive bracing may provide addition support for the soft tissue structures around the inside of your ankle. Simple ankle supports can be self- bought. Firmer, more prescriptive bracing may be provided by your Podiatrist or Orthotics.







For further information and advice please contact:

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