

## Acupuncture for Heel Pain

A new study concludes that acupuncture is effective for the treatment of plantar heel pain. The researchers note that acupuncture treatment clinical outcomes are comparable to the use of medications, night splints and stretching as evidenced in multiple studies. The researchers also note that results demonstrate that acupuncture has more significant improvements in both pain relief and the restoration of function than a standard regime of care that includes non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications. Based on these findings, the researchers formally recommend acupuncture for the treatment of plantar heel pain.



Heel pain is caused by a variety of conditions. The most typical causes of heel pain are Baxter nerve compression, plantar fasciitis, fat pad atrophy, Achilles tendonitis, and stress fractures of the calcaneus. The Baxter nerve is on the plantar surface of the foot and may become entrapped thereby causing pain and numbness. Acupuncture is often applied to relieve the inflammation of local tissues to release pressure on the Baxter nerve.

Plantar fasciitis is inflammation of the tissues in the bottom of the foot and creates significant foot and heel pain. A key symptom of plantar fasciitis is foot and heel pain when stepping onto the floor for the first time in the morning when rising from bed. Acupuncture is successfully used to enhance the micro-circulation of blood to the local region to nourish the tendons and ligaments. This allows for the healing process to engage and releases the inflammation of the plantar tissues.

Fat pad atrophy of the heel pad is common in the elderly and those with a history of steroid injections. Acupuncture helps to reduce local inflammation thereby providing significant pain management for this type of heel pain.

Achilles tendonitis is a chronic injury to a major tendon that connects the heel to the muscles of the lower leg. This can make walking very painful. Acupuncture can provide rapid pain relief for this condition but, more importantly, helps in the healing of the Achilles tendon thereby eliminating the heel pain.

Stress fractures of the calcaneous bone are typically caused by overuse and injuries. Acupuncture is used to relieve this type of heel pain by speeding the wound healing process of the fracture. Combined with rest and activity modification, acupuncture helps to eliminate heel pain due to this type of stress fracture.

References:

Acupunct Med. doi:10.1136/acupmed-2012-010183. The effectiveness of acupuncture for plantar heel pain: a systematic review. Richard James Clark, Maria Tighe.