

# MODERN MEDICINE

## clinical NEWS

KEEPING YOU CURRENT ON OFFICE PRACTICE

### Primary care physicians can easily manage heel pain

Doing three simple stretching exercises, coupled with wearing inexpensive shoe inserts, provides significant relief from heel pain, reports orthopedic surgeon Glenn B. Pfeffer, MD. Pfeffer spoke at the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society's winter meeting on Feb. 16 in San Francisco.

"Patients should do these exercises at least three times a day for 5 to 10 minutes [*see facing page*]," Pfeffer told MODERN MEDICINE. "One session every hour is even better.

"They can easily be done for 15 to 30 seconds on an elevator, escalator, curb, or step," he continues. "Patients should see some improvement in about 4 weeks."

Pfeffer believes that primary care physicians can play a much larger role in treating foot problems if the desire is there.

"Primary care physicians can handle many foot problems themselves without having to refer their patients to specialists," he says. "I recommend that you keep some pairs of foot inserts on hand in your office. You can treat patients yourself quickly and effectively by prescribing stretching exercises and stocking up, for only about \$50, on foot inserts."

He says that custom orthotics are overprescribed. They are usually not appropriate for initial treatment.

For patients who are not helped by a combination of exercise and inserts, a shot of cortisone in the tender area of the heel might be appropriate. Pfeffer says that cortisone cures about 15% of patients and improves the conditions of nearly half.

Last December, MODERN MEDICINE reported on the results of a study by Pfeffer and colleagues that involved 236 heel pain sufferers. The participants were assigned to one of five groups. In one group, participants did plantar fascia and Achilles tendon stretching exercises only. In other groups, subjects exercised and used one of four shoe inserts: a Tuli heel cup, a custom-made polypropylene plastic arch support, an over-the-counter silicon heel pad (Bauerfeind Viscoheel), or a felt heel pad/arch support (HAPAD).

After 8 weeks, 72% of those who did only the stretching exercises reported improvement in heel pain, while 95% of patients who combined stretching exercises with the Bauerfeind insert rated their condition improved. Eighty-eight percent of Tuli heel cup users, 81% of HAPAD wearers, and 68% of custom-made arch device users reported improvement.

*Dr. Pfeffer is a San Francisco orthopaedic surgeon at California Pacific Medical Center who specializes in foot and ankle problems.*