

Night Splints and Foot Pain



Night splints are **removable foot and ankle braces** designed to treat plantar fasciitis by passively stretching the Achilles tendon and plantar fascia, a dense band of fibrous tissue that runs under the foot and supports the arch. The Achilles tendon attaches the calf muscle to the heel bone and puts tension on the plantar fascia. Over time, if this tension is too great, tiny tears develop in the plantar fascia, causing heel pain and tenderness. This condition is called **plantar fasciitis**.

Pain from plantar fasciitis usually is worse first thing in the morning because most people sleep with their plantar fascia in a flexed, or shortened, position. Night splints are designed to hold the ankle in a neutral position, with the Achilles tendon and plantar fascia lengthened. One type of splint is made of a **hard plastic shell and a soft inner layer** that allows the angle of flexion to be adjusted. Another type **fits over the front of the ankle and pulls the toes upward** to stretch the Achilles tendon and loosen the plantar fascia.

Night splints are most beneficial for people who have had heel pain for more than 12 months. They work best when combined with exercises that stretch the Achilles tendon and strengthen the foot muscles. We can show you some of these exercises to do at home. Even when the pain disappears, these exercises should be performed several times a week to prevent its return.

We may suggest other lifestyle changes, along with using night splints and exercise. These include

- **reducing the amount of time spent running, jogging or standing;**
- **replacing shoes that have lost their cushioning or support;**
- **using arch supports or orthotics;** and
- **maintaining a healthy weight.**

The longer you experience heel pain, the longer it will take to treat. Through a combination of lifestyle changes, exercise and night splints, however, most people can become pain-free.