What Causes Lupus Heel Pain?

by BARBARA LEECH

What Can Be Done About Lupus Heel Pain?

With my lupus in a full-blown flare right now, I am suffering from all sorts of pain — some in places that don't seem to have an easy explanation. Foot pain in lupus is common, but I have always thought it was related to swelling in the joints within my feet, Raynaud's phenomenon, general water-retention swelling or wearing shoes that aggravate the situation.

But during this most recent flare, I developed a pain in the bottom of my left foot that can only be described as what you might feel if you stepped on a nail. It is focused in one direct spot on the heel of my foot; though there is also aching in my foot joints and Raynaud's has my feet looking a pretty lupus-purple about 90 percent of the time, this new pain is very different.

I always want answers. It is my downfall with this mysterious disease, since so many things seem to happen to my body and I always feel compelled to try and figure out why.

So, I researched, asked fellow lupies and then asked my doctor about the cause of this latest development. I found out that I'm not alone.

Plantar Fasciitis

One of the probable causes is lupus-induced plantar fasciitis, which is the result of inflammation of the small muscles in the foot where they attach to the heel. The condition involves inflammation of the plantar fascia — a tough, fibrous band of tissue that runs along the sole of the foot with attachments to the heel bone.

The condition is caused by lupus inflammation along the attachment points of those tendons. This can also lead to a bone spur, which is basically a growth of bone on the bottom of the heel along the attachment of the small muscles in the foot.

The spur forms when the bone tries to hold onto the muscles to keep them from pulling away. The heel is a common spot for this to occur and the pain associated is most often described as deep sharp pain when you get out of bed in the morning or after sitting for a prolonged period of time. It can extend into the arch of the foot as well.

What Can Be Done?

- **Wear cushioned shoes or cushioned slippers when walking, even around your home.** The pain is often noted to be more severe in bare feet or in shoes with minimal or no padding at the sole.
- **Keep moving.** Inactivity can make it worse. Often once you have warmed up the area with slow walking and movement, the pain lessons.
- **If you exercise regularly, decrease the distance and duration of walking and running.** Switch from

jumping or running activities to activities such as swimming or cycling to reduce the stress on the foot, and change the exercise surface (e.g. from concrete to grass).
- **Massage the area of pain.** Try doing it in the morning after a warm bath or shower.

Bone spurs, according to my doctor, are rarely the actual cause of the pain, so surgery is not usually required to remove them. Treatment of the swelling and loosening of the muscles within the foot produces the best results.

Since this problem is new to me, I encourage you to speak with your doctor, who may recommend a podiatrist to diagnosis the issue and hopefully you can then find the best treatment plan for your pain.