

# 12-Week Plantar Fasciitis Exercise Programme

Free NHS-Backed Recovery Guide

✓ Based on NHS Clinical Guidelines

✓ 10 Evidence-Based Exercises

✓ Free — No Sign-Up Required

## What's Inside This Guide

<b>10 exercises</b>	Stretches, strengthening, rolling and hip strength
<b>Step-by-step</b>	Clear numbered instructions for every exercise
<b>12-week plan</b>	Progressive week-by-week programme from beginner to full recovery
<b>Pain rules</b>	NHS guidance on how hard to push and when to stop
<b>Daily tracker</b>	Tick-box log to record your daily exercise completion
<b>Free PDF</b>	Print this guide and keep it by your bed or sofa

## How to Use This Programme

- 1 Start the stretches (Exercises 1–4) from Day 1. Do them at least twice every day.
- 2 Tick the box in the daily tracker each time you complete your exercises.
- 3 Add the strengthening exercises (Exercises 5–7) from Week 3 as instructed.
- 4 Use the pain scale. Stop or reduce if pain exceeds 5 out of 10.
- 5 Follow the 12-week progression table — do not rush ahead.
- 6 Continue stretching even after pain resolves to prevent recurrence.

### **Before You Start: Pain Rules (NHS Guidance)**

Use a 0 to 10 pain scale where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain imaginable.

Stop or reduce the exercise if pain exceeds 5 out of 10.

Mild discomfort of 3 to 4 out of 10 is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

If pain stays above 5 out of 10 for more than 24 hours after exercise, reduce your activity level.

Source: East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust

### **Medical Disclaimer**

This guide is for general information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

Always consult your GP, NHS physiotherapist or podiatrist before starting a new exercise programme.

If you are pregnant, have diabetes, circulatory conditions, osteoporosis or other health conditions please speak to your clinician before beginning.

## SECTION 1: Essential Stretches

Do these 2–3 times every day. Morning is the most important session.

These four stretches form the foundation of plantar fasciitis recovery. They should be started immediately — from day one. Always do the plantar fascia stretch and towel stretch **before your first steps in the morning**.

### 1 Plantar Fascia Stretch

Beginner

**Sets**  
1 set

**Reps / Hold**  
3 reps | Hold 15–30 sec

**Frequency**  
2–3 times daily — before first steps

#### How To Do It

1. Sit in a chair and cross the affected foot over your other knee.
2. Using the opposite hand, grasp your toes and gently pull them back toward your shin.
3. You should feel a clear stretch along the arch of your foot.
4. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Release slowly.
5. Repeat 3 times. Always do this before taking your first steps in the morning.

**Benefits:** ✓ Stretches the plantar fascia directly ✓ Reduces morning start-up pain ✓ Most recommended stretch by NHS physiotherapists

✓ Recommended by Royal Berkshire NHS Physiotherapy Department

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

### 2 Gastrocnemius Calf Stretch

Beginner

**Sets**  
1 set

**Reps / Hold**  
6 reps | Hold 30 sec

**Frequency**  
2–3 times daily

#### How To Do It

1. Stand facing a wall with your hands flat against it at shoulder height.
2. Place the affected foot behind you with the heel flat on the floor.
3. Keep the back knee straight and both feet pointing directly forward.
4. Lean gently forward until you feel a stretch in the upper calf of the back leg.
5. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 6 times on each side.

■ Keep the back heel completely flat on the floor throughout this stretch.

**Benefits:** ✓ Stretches the gastrocnemius muscle ✓ Reduces tension on the plantar fascia ✓ Targets tight calves — a key risk factor

✓ Recommended by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

### 3 Soleus Calf Stretch (Bent Knee)

Beginner

**Sets**  
1 set

**Reps / Hold**  
3 reps | Hold 20–30 sec

**Frequency**  
2–3 times daily

#### How To Do It

1. Take the same starting position as Exercise 2 — hands on wall, foot behind you.
2. This time bend both knees slightly.
3. You should feel the stretch lower in the calf, closer to the ankle.
4. Hold 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

**Benefits:** ✓ Stretches the soleus muscle ✓ Targets the lower calf and Achilles tendon ✓ Important if you also have Achilles tightness

✓ Recommended by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS FT

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

### 4 Towel Stretch

Beginner

**Sets**  
1 set

**Reps / Hold**  
3 reps | Hold 30 sec

**Frequency**  
Morning — before first steps

#### How To Do It

1. Sit on the floor (or in bed) with your leg stretched straight out in front of you.
2. Loop a rolled towel or resistance band around the ball of your foot.
3. Hold both ends of the towel and gently pull toward you, keeping your knee straight.
4. You will feel a stretch in the arch and calf simultaneously.
5. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

**Benefits:** ✓ Stretches the fascia and Achilles at the same time ✓ Can be done in bed before getting up ✓ Ideal for reducing severe morning pain

✓ Recommended by Lincolnshire Community Health NHS Trust

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

## SECTION 2: Strengthening Exercises

Begin Week 3. Do strengthening every other day — rest days are essential.

These exercises build the strength in your foot and calf to support long-term recovery and prevent recurrence. **Do not start these until Week 3** — your stretching routine needs to be established first.

### 5 Eccentric Calf Raise

Intermediate

**Sets**  
3 sets

**Reps / Hold**  
12 reps | 1 min rest between sets

**Frequency**  
Every other day

#### How To Do It

1. Place a rolled towel or thick book on the floor. Stand with the balls of your feet on the towel so your toes are slightly elevated.
2. Slowly rise up onto your toes — take 3 seconds on the way up.
3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds.
4. Slowly lower your heel down as far as comfortable — take 3 seconds on the way down.
5. Complete 3 sets of 12, with 1 minute rest between each set.
6. Once this feels easy, add light load — wear a backpack with a few books inside.

■ If pain exceeds 4/10 reduce the number of reps. Increase load very gradually over weeks.

**Benefits:** ✓ Loads the plantar fascia progressively ✓ Builds calf and foot strength ✓ Strong evidence base for chronic plantar fasciitis

✓ Recommended by University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

### 6 Arch Lifts (Short Foot Exercise)

Beginner

**Sets**  
3 sets

**Reps / Hold**  
10 reps | Hold 5 sec each

**Frequency**  
Daily

#### How To Do It

1. Stand barefoot on a flat surface.
2. Try to lift the arch of your foot without curling your toes.
3. Imagine you are trying to bring your heel and the ball of your foot closer together — without lifting either off the ground.
4. Hold for 5 seconds. Release. Repeat 10 times.

**Benefits:** ✓ Strengthens intrinsic foot muscles ✓ Improves arch stability ✓ Reduces long-term risk of recurrence

✓ Recommended by Lincolnshire Community Health NHS Trust

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

## 7 Marble Pickups and Towel Scrunches

Beginner

**Sets**  
2 sets

**Reps / Hold**  
10 reps each

**Frequency**  
Daily — can be done seated at a desk

### How To Do It

1. **MARBLE PICKUPS:** Place 10 small objects or marbles on the floor. Using only your toes, pick them up one at a time and drop them into a cup.
2. **TOWEL SCRUNCHES:** Place a small towel flat on the floor. Using only your toes, scrunch the towel toward you. Repeat 10 times.

**Benefits:** ✓ Strengthens intrinsic foot muscles ✓ Improves toe flexor strength ✓ Easy to do seated at a desk or on the sofa

✓ Recommended by Lincolnshire Community Health NHS Trust

■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

## SECTION 3: Rolling and Self-Massage

Twice daily alongside your stretching routine.

### 8 Frozen Bottle Rolling

Beginner

**Sets**  
1 session

**Reps / Hold**  
5–10 minutes

**Frequency**  
Twice daily

#### How To Do It

1. Fill a small plastic bottle with water and place in the freezer until frozen.
2. Sit in a chair and place the frozen bottle under the arch of the affected foot. Keep your sock on.
3. Roll the bottle slowly back and forth under the arch and heel.
4. Apply gentle downward pressure as you roll.
5. Continue for 5 to 10 minutes.
6. Alternatively use a tennis ball (gentle) or golf ball (firmer) without ice.

#### Benefits:

✓ Ice therapy reduces inflammation ✓ Massages the plantar fascia simultaneously ✓ Can be done at a desk or on the sofa

✓ Recommended by Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust

■ Stop if pain exceeds **5/10**. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.

## SECTION 4: Hip and Proximal Strength

Begin Week 7. Addresses the root cause of altered gait mechanics.

#### Why Hip Exercises?

Research from University Hospitals Plymouth NHS FT shows that weakness in the hip stabiliser muscles contributes to altered walking mechanics, which increases stress on the plantar fascia.

These two exercises address the root cause — not just the symptoms.

9 Glute Bridge			Beginner
Sets	Reps / Hold	Frequency	
2 sets	10–15 reps	Daily	
<p><b>How To Do It</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lie on your back with your knees bent to 90 degrees, feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.</li> <li>2. Tighten your glutes (bottom muscles).</li> <li>3. Lift your hips off the floor until your body forms a straight line from shoulders to knees.</li> <li>4. Hold for 2 to 3 seconds.</li> <li>5. Lower slowly. Repeat 10 to 15 times.</li> </ol> <p><b>Benefits:</b> ✓ Strengthens gluteus muscles ✓ Improves hip extension ✓ Reduces compensatory stress on the foot and plantar fascia</p> <p>✓ Recommended by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS FT</p> <p>■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.</p>			

10 Clamshell (Hip Abductor)			Beginner
Sets	Reps / Hold	Frequency	
2 sets	10–15 reps each side	Daily	
<p><b>How To Do It</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lie on your side with the affected foot on top.</li> <li>2. Bend your knees to approximately 90 degrees. Keep your hips, shoulders and feet in a straight line.</li> <li>3. Keeping your feet together, slowly lift the top knee upward like a clamshell opening.</li> <li>4. Do not let your hips roll backward.</li> <li>5. Hold 2 seconds. Lower slowly. Repeat 10 to 15 times on each side.</li> </ol> <p><b>Benefits:</b> ✓ Strengthens hip abductor muscles ✓ Corrects gait and walking mechanics ✓ Prevents inward knee roll which stresses the plantar fascia</p> <p>✓ Recommended by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS FT</p> <p>■ Stop if pain exceeds 5/10. Mild discomfort (3–4/10) is acceptable during strengthening exercises.</p>			

## YOUR 12-WEEK PROGRESSIVE PROGRAMME

Follow this schedule. Consistency matters more than intensity.

Start slowly and build up week by week. The table below shows which exercises to do each week and how often. **Do not skip ahead** — the gradual progression is intentional and allows the plantar fascia time to adapt and strengthen.

Week	Exercises	Frequency	Key Focus
1–2	Exercises 1, 2, 3, 4 (All stretches)	Stretches: twice daily Morning session is essential	Establish the habit. Consistency every day matters more than
3–4	Exercises 1, 2, 3, 4 Plus: 6, 7 (Add strengthening)	Stretches: twice daily Strengthening: once daily	Add arch lifts and marble pickups. Keep all stretches going.
5–6	Exercises 1–4, 6, 7 Plus: 5 (Add calf raises)	Stretches: twice daily Calf raises: every other day	Begin eccentric calf raises with bodyweight only. Rest days be
7–8	Exercises 1–7 Plus: 8, 9, 10 (Full programme)	Stretches: twice daily Strengthening: every other day Rolling: twice daily	Full programme. Add glute bridges and clamshells. Begin light
9–10	Full programme (Exercises 1–10)	As above Progress calf raise load	Increase load on calf raises gradually. Add a light backpack if
11–12	Full programme (Exercises 1–10)	As above Begin gradual return to activity	Begin increasing normal activity level. Pain score should be 2/

### Signs You Are Making Progress

- Morning pain that is less severe and settles more quickly than before.
- Fewer flare-ups throughout the day.
- Reduced tenderness when you press the heel.
- Being able to stand for longer periods without pain building.
- Measure improvement week by week — not day by day. Plantar fasciitis is not linear.

### When to Reduce or Stop

- Pain exceeds 5 out of 10 during the exercise.
- Pain does not settle within 24 hours of exercising.
- You have had a significant flare-up in the last 48 hours.
- The foot is visibly swollen or warm to touch.
- See your GP if pain has not improved after 6 to 8 weeks of consistent daily exercise.

## DAILY EXERCISE TRACKER

Tick the box each time you complete your exercise session.

Print this page and keep it somewhere visible — by your bed, on the fridge or at your desk. Ticking the boxes each day is a powerful motivational tool and helps you spot if you are missing sessions.

### The Pain Scale — Use This Every Day

0–2	3–4	5–6	7–10
No pain or trivial	Mild discomfort Acceptable during strengthening	Moderate pain Reduce intensity or stop	Severe pain Stop. Rest. See GP if persistent

### 12-Week Daily Tracker

Week	Mon Morn	Mon Eve	Tue Morn	Tue Eve	Wed Morn	Wed Eve	Thu Morn	Thu Eve	Fri Morn	Fri Eve	Sat	Sun	Pain Score	Notes
W1 Ex 1–4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W2 Ex 1–4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W3 Ex 1–4, 6–7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W4 Ex 1–4, 6–7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W5 Ex 1–7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W6 Ex 1–7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W7 Ex 1–10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W8 Ex 1–10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W9 Full programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W10 Full programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W11 Full programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
W12 Full programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	

= not yet done |  = completed | Record your morning pain score (0–10) in the Pain Score column each day before your first steps.

## QUICK REFERENCE — ALL 10 EXERCISES AT A GLANCE

#	Exercise	Section	Sets / Reps	Frequency	Start Week
1	Plantar Fascia Stretch	Stretches	1×3 reps 15–30 sec hold	2–3x daily	Week 1
2	Gastrocnemius Calf Stretch	Stretches	1×6 reps 30 sec hold	2–3x daily	Week 1
3	Soleus Calf Stretch	Stretches	1×3 reps 20–30 sec hold	2–3x daily	Week 1
4	Towel Stretch	Stretches	1×3 reps 30 sec hold	Morning daily	Week 1
5	Eccentric Calf Raise	Strengthening	3×12 reps	Every other day	Week 5
6	Arch Lifts	Strengthening	3×10 reps 5 sec hold	Daily	Week 3
7	Marble Pickups / Towel Scrunch	Strengthening	2×10 reps	Daily	Week 3
8	Frozen Bottle Rolling	Self-Massage	5–10 minutes	Twice daily	Week 1
9	Glute Bridge	Hip Strength	2×10–15 reps	Daily	Week 7
10	Clamshell	Hip Strength	2×10–15 reps each side	Daily	Week 7

### Clinical Sources

Royal Berkshire NHS Physiotherapy Department (July 2023) · University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS · Lincolnshire Community Health NHS Trust · University Hospitals Plymouth NHS FT · Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust · Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust · East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust · NIHR Evidence — Best Practice Guide for Plantar Heel Pain (2021)

[plantarfasciitisrecovery.co.uk](https://plantarfasciitisrecovery.co.uk)

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