

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

The only thing that could spoil all the positive energy of the National Football League season now is if one of your star players goes on the injured reserve list.

Victor Cruz, a New York Giants wide receiver, almost didn't make the opening games due to a heel injury on Aug. 18. Thankfully for Giants fans, he was able to play in the opening games, which meant his heel injury is almost completely behind him.

Other players may not be so lucky though. Whether you are a pro-athlete or just a weekend sports enthusiast, some precautions should be taken to prevent you sitting on the sidelines. Heel injuries are common in athletes, but it doesn't take a brutal contact sport like football to cause them.



Vail

Plantar fasciitis is one of the most common foot pathologies I see in my practice. This disorder is responsible for more than 1 million patient visits every year in our country, so it is wise to know how to avoid this painful condition and how to treat it.

Pro-athletes are used to long and hard training sessions. But if you haven't trained or run in a while, it is best to start off slow and build momentum to avoid injury. Professional football players should know their own body limitations and make adjustments to the length and intensity of their training.

The plantar fascia is a thin band of tissue that is attached very closely to the skin on the bottom of your foot.

If you stress it too much by exerting yourself too quickly, then micro-trauma to the tissue will result. Repetitive micro-trauma will lead to painful inflammation and you will develop heel pain that is most noticeable when you take your first step after getting out of bed in the morning.

Always stretch before your workouts and make sure you are not taking on more than your body can handle.

Also known as heel spur syndrome, the condition is often successfully treated with conservative measures, such as anti-inflammatory medications, ice packs, stretching exercises and splints, custom orthotic devices, and physical therapy. Please consult your physician before taking any medications, though.

In persistent cases, autologous platelet concentrate — an injection into the plantar fascia using your own platelets, the healing trigger factor of blood — or extracorporeal shock wave treatment may be used to treat the heel pain. Many pros have used these conservative approaches successfully to get back without surgical intervention.

Faulty running shoes are another common cause of plantar fasciitis. You should make sure you are in an athletic shoe that is designed for the contours of your feet and the sport you are playing.

You should also make sure that you are replacing your athletic shoes on a regular basis. The lifespan of your athletic shoe will be determined by the frequency of your sports activity.

If you run or play sports daily, you may need to replace your shoes every six months or sooner. Your shoes may not show signs of wear, but the internal support in the arch and heel will not support your foot properly anymore and ultimately put stress on your feet that will cause damage.

Replacing your shoes promptly at the first signs of foot pain may actually help you avoid a serious injury.

Professional certified shoe fitters can match a specific running/athletic shoe to a certain foot type. A podiatrist with an interest in sports medicine could help you devise a running plan that would avoid this common foot disorder.

Lastly, avoid running on uneven surfaces and concrete.

Your foot goes through a natural progression of very specific movements from when your heel first strikes the ground to when your toes leave the ground. This progression is known as the 'gait cycle.'

Unyielding surfaces interrupt this normal gait cycle, again causing stress and micro-trauma to your plantar fascia.

Whether you are a professional athlete or someone wanting to take their first jog in 15 years, foot injuries as a result of exercise can be debilitating and cause you months of rehabilitation.

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System experts may be sent to Weekend Doctor, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.