Effectiveness of prefabricated foot orthoses compared to sham orthoses in plantar fasciitis treatment: A study of middle-aged women

Plantar fasciitis is one of the most common foot pathologies, affecting approximately 10% of the population. It is a frustrating and disabling condition of pain and inflammation, with a variety of proposed aetiologies and associated risk factors confounding the exact cause of plantar fasciitis. As uncertainty exists regarding the aetiology of plantar fasciitis, a plethora of treatments are available, ranging from those designed to reduce inflammation to those that aim to reduce excessive tension and injury to the plantar fascia, such as foot orthoses. Orthoses are a commonly advocated therapy for plantar fasciitis. Ultimately, resolution of symptoms occurs with orthoses, or after a prolonged course with or without other treatments occurs. However a lack of appropriate evidence is available to support their use. Evidence is also lacking as to the role of common risk factors such as obesity and ankle equinus in developing plantar fasciitis and prolonging its course through resistance to treatment. To rectify this, investigation is needed to establish the clinical effectiveness of orthoses for plantar fasciitis.

A single blinded, randomised crossover trial was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a prefabricated foot orthosis compared to a sham orthosis for short term management of plantar fasciitis, in a group of middle-aged obese women. It was found that three weeks of use of a prefabricated orthosis produced marked improvements in pain, disability, and foot function as measured by the Foot Function Index. These results provide useful clinical evidence for treatment effectiveness in plantar fasciitis, and will add to the body knowledge on its management.