



Dr. Carroll (left) and Dr. Nirenberg (right) stand with the revolutionary shockwave machine, which they are now using to alleviate heel pain.

Foot doctors use hi-tech treatment for heel pain

Drs. Michael Nirenberg and Drs. Michael Carroll, Merrillville foot and ankle surgeons, are now using a new, hi-tech device to literally shock heel pain away.

"Heel pain is one of the most common problems we see," says Dr. Nirenberg. "Many patients have pain from the moment they put their foot on the floor first thing in the morning. They come in here limping."

The shockwave treatment is for a specific type of heel pain called plantar fasciitis. It is a problem that occurs when a band of connective tissue, the fascia, which extends from the heel to the toes becomes inflamed and sore. For many people, the shockwave treatment completely eliminates the pain from plantar fasciitis. Within a day or two, most people are walking normally again.

The treatment uses a special device, a shockwave generator, to propel electromagnetic shockwaves into the heels of patients with pain. The shockwaves stimulate the body's natural healing response to get rid of the pain and inflammation. The shockwave device uses the same type of shockwaves as those used by lithotripsy machines to treat painful kidney stones.

Prior to the shockwave procedure, people with heel pain that could not be alleviated with other conservative methods had to undergo "open" heel surgery.

The shockwave treatment is an alternative for those people with heel pain that has been persisting and has not resolved

with conservative treatments such as custom made orthotics and stretching exercises. The shockwave treatment does not involve any cutting or surgery and patients can be wide-awake.

"Most patients are back doing their normal activities in a day or two," Dr. Carroll says. This quick recovery is a stark contrast to those people who undergo "open" surgery for heel pain and often need to have stitches and must use crutches for a period of time. "The shockwave device is a real breakthrough," says Dr. Nirenberg.

The shockwave procedure was approved by the FDA in October of 2000 specifically for heel pain and though it is not for everyone, it has a high success rate and does not require any cutting or stitches.

A research study on the shockwave treatment published in the May 2004 issue of Foot and Ankle International found a 94% success rate in alleviating heel pain. The shockwave treatment cannot be done on women who are pregnant, people taking blood thinners, or children.

Even though the shockwave treatment is only approved by the FDA for heel pain, in Europe it is being used on many different kinds of muscle-skeletal aches and pains, such as tendonitis and tennis elbow.

"I think using shockwaves for heel pain is just the start," say Dr. Nirenberg. "This technology is going to become widespread." Drs. Nirenberg and Carroll can be reached at their office, Friendly Foot Care, at (219)769-4601.