



What Is Fascia?

✓ Medically Reviewed by [Dan Brennan, MD](#) on June 20, 2021

Fascia is a layer of [connective tissue](#) below the skin.

Surgeons used to think that fascia is a tissue that just covered organs, muscles, and bones. Now, though the medical world knows that the body's fascia also makes up some tendons, ligaments, and other structures, some researchers believe that it connects all parts of the body.

Body Fascia

Body fascia is multi-layered, and it plays an active role in the body. It supports tissues and organs, lessens friction, eases [muscle tension](#), and tightens up reflexively. It also helps your bloodstream, bone tissue, and skeletal muscles.

When it's healthy, your fascia is slippery and smooth, and it stretches with you as you move. If it's not doing well, it can get thicker, stickier, drier, and tighter.

Because fascia is so important to your body's functions, problems with it can cause you a lot of pain.

Layers of Fascia

Your fascia can be broken down into four main layers: superficial, deep, visceral, and parietal. These layers have nerves that make your fascia almost as sensitive as your skin.

Superficial fascia. This layer is right under your [skin](#). It's thicker in the main part of your body (your stomach, chest, etc.), and it gets thinner in places further away from your center — like your hands and feet. Superficial fascia can include muscle fibers that make up many different structures in your body.

Deep fascia. Your deep fascia covers bones, muscles, nerves, and blood vessels. It can be broken into two subtypes:

- aponeurotic fascia — which is thicker and separates more easily from muscles
- epimysial fascia — which is thinner and more tightly connected to muscles

Visceral fascia. The visceral layer goes around certain organs that settle into your body's open spaces, including the lungs, heart, and stomach.

Parietal fascia. Tissues that line a body cavity are called parietal fascia. For example, your pelvis is lined by parietal fascia.

Fascia Pain

Between layers of body fascia, a substance called hyaluronan helps the layers work smoothly with each other. When the hyaluronan dries up, your body fascia can seize up around muscles, make it harder to move, or get [uncomfortable knots](#). Dried-out fascia — called fascia adhesions — can happen because of:

- A lifestyle without enough physical activity
- Activity that uses the same part of your body over and over

- Surgery or injury that causes damage to one part of your body

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Pain in your fascia is commonly mistaken for muscle pain or [joint pain](#). The biggest difference is that muscle and joint pain worsens as you keep moving, while fascia pain gets better with movement and heat.

Fascia adhesions can be temporarily fixed, but they can also get worse as time goes on. If you leave your fascia pain untreated, your fascia will draw tighter around your muscles and can create very sensitive knots in your muscles, called trigger points.

[Myofascial pain syndrome](#) and [plantar fasciitis](#) are common conditions that can affect your fascia.

Myofascial pain syndrome. Myofascial pain happens when the same muscle is tightened and released over and over again from repeated motion or tension from stress. Symptoms can include deep muscle pain that doesn't go away, sensitive knots in your muscle, and inability to sleep because of the pain. It's different from muscle tension pain because it gets worse over time.

Plantar fasciitis. There is a thick section of fascia on the bottom of your foot called the plantar fascia. When it gets inflamed, it causes intense heel pain. You're most likely to feel plantar fasciitis when you walk in the morning after a night of being off your feet or when you stand up after sitting for a long time.

The medical world doesn't know what causes plantar fasciitis, but people who are older, are heavier, spend a lot of time on their feet, or do repetitive exercises like running have higher chances of getting it.

Keeping Your Fascia Healthy

Do your best to keep your fascia well stretched. The more flexible it is, the less likely it is to cause you pain. Move around, [stretch frequently](#), and try to keep good posture if you do a lot of sitting or standing. This helps relieve fascia adhesions.

If you have fascia pain that isn't going away with stretching, try to loosen trigger points by trying the following:

- **Heat therapy.** Take a hot shower or bath or place a heat source on the uncomfortable area.
- **Yoga.** Consult a yoga therapist for yoga poses that focus on relieving pain in your affected fascia.
- **Using a foam roller.** Give yourself a massage by using a foam roller to help your body get rid of tension.
- **Massage therapy.** Get a series of massages that can release pressure from trigger points.
- **Acupuncture.** Get acupuncture from an acupuncturist, who'll place needles in your affected fascia can help connective tissue relax.

Show Sources

SOURCES:

Fascia Research Congress: "About Fascia."

Johns Hopkins Medicine: "Muscle Pain: It May Actually Be Your Fascia."

Mayo Clinic: "Myofascial pain syndrome"; "Plantar fasciitis."

StatPearls: "Anatomy, Fascia Layers."

