

MUSCLE STRAIN — LEG & CALF

Plantaris Strain (Tennis Leg Variant)

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The plantaris is a thin, pencil-like muscle with a very long tendon running between the two larger calf muscles. A rupture sounds and feels dramatic but is benign — the other calf muscles fully take over.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

The same push-off mechanism as gastrocnemius strain; the two often occur together and are distinguished on examination or ultrasound/MRI.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

A sudden pop or snap in the calf with immediate sharp pain, sometimes surprisingly good function afterward compared with how dramatic it felt.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** 1–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 2–4 weeks
- **Grade III:** 4–6 weeks — even complete plantaris ruptures recover fully without surgery

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Symptom-guided return: early motion, calf strengthening, and progressive return to push-off activity.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

General calf conditioning; no specific prevention is required for this small muscle.

WHEN TO CALL US

The same DVT warning as any calf injury: one-sided worsening swelling, tightness, and warmth deserves same-day evaluation.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/plantaris-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.