

Heel Pain (Signs & Symptoms)



Heel pain is a very common foot problem encountered by podiatrists. This leaflet has been designed to alert patients to the common causes of heel pain and the treatments available from your podiatrist.

Plantar Fasciitis

Plantar fasciitis is an inflammatory condition of the plantar fascia, which is a long and strong band of tissue which connects the heel bone to the bases of the toes. The plantar fascia functions to support the arch of the foot and to absorb shock from the ground during walking and running.

Causes

- A recent change in exercise patterns
- Un-supportive shoes
- Being overweight
- Tightness in the calf muscles
- Prolonged standing

These are just a few of the many causes of plantar fasciitis. It is believed that people between the ages of 40 & 60 are most likely to develop plantar fasciitis; however the condition may arise at any age.

Symptoms

Pain is the main symptom of plantar fasciitis; the majority of patients describe the pain as being similar to that of tooth ache; a constant dull ache. Pain is often worse when first stepping out of bed in the mornings. At other times pain may be present after standing from long periods of rest, or may be continuous throughout the day.

Diagnosis

The podiatrist is able to diagnose the condition by performing several minor tests and by visual inspection, however sometimes x-rays and MRI scans are performed to view the extent of the condition.

Treatment

- Rest – avoiding exercise, running, walking and vigorous stretching.
- Avoid walking barefoot – wear shoes with cushioned soles.
- Pain relief – you may find some relief by taking Ibrufen, or paracetamol.
- Ice – icing the area will bring some relief.
- Steroid Injection – temporary pain relief, however not a solution to the problem.
- Ultrasound – your podiatrist may provide you with a course of ultrasound which can be very effective in relieving the symptoms.
- Insole/Orthotic therapy – your podiatrist will provide you with insoles or orthotics to support your foot.

Orthotics can be very successful in treating plantar fasciitis. The prognosis is very good when treated by a podiatrist. The majority of patients seen fully recover with the treatments performed.

Heel Spur

Heel spurs are another common cause of heel pain. A heel spur develops due to an abnormal growth of bone formed due to calcium deposits that form when the plantar fascia pulls away from the heel bone. They cause extreme pain when standing or walking. Symptoms characteristically continue throughout the day. Treatments include insole / orthotic therapy from your podiatrist with specialized components to take the pressure away from the area. Orthotics are also used to control and correct the functioning of the foot.

Tarsal Tunnel Syndrome

Tarsal tunnel syndrome is a painful condition where the tibial nerve (a larger nerve which runs down the inner side of the leg to behind the inner ankle bone) is compressed by the surrounding structures in the ankle. This condition occurs commonly in people who present with flat feet. Patients often complain of numbness, sharp shooting pains which may extend across the foot and into the heel or further up the leg. Symptoms are very unpleasant when walking, inflammation can occur causing more pain. Treatments often include the use of ultrasound and insole / orthotic therapy from a podiatrist.

Posterior Tibial Tendon Dysfunction

Posterior tibial tendon dysfunction also known as PTTD is another common cause of heel pain. The posterior tibial tendon is a large tendon that runs a similar course to the tibial nerve. Its main function is to support the arch of the foot. PTTD is a condition where changes occur to the tendon which impair its function. As a result the arch of the foot may flatten causing pain when walking. PTTD is a progressive condition which means that if it is not treated successfully it will continue to get worse. Symptoms often include pain in the arch of the foot or around the inner ankle bone. Treatment will involve the use of ultrasound and orthotic therapy. Orthoses have been suggested in the literature to be successful in treating PTTD.

Other causes of Heel Pain

- Bursitis – a sac of fluid which develops at the site of where the plantar fascia connects to the heel bone.
- Fracture of the heel bone,
- Achilles Tendonitis – inflammation of the Achilles tendon,
- Osteoporosis,
- Paget's disease,
- Osteoarthritis,
- Rheumatoid Arthritis.

If you have heel pain, it is important to have your foot assessed by podiatrists who will use their

knowledge and skills to diagnose the cause of the problem and treat using specialized treatment methods.

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