



Heel pain / plantar fasciitis

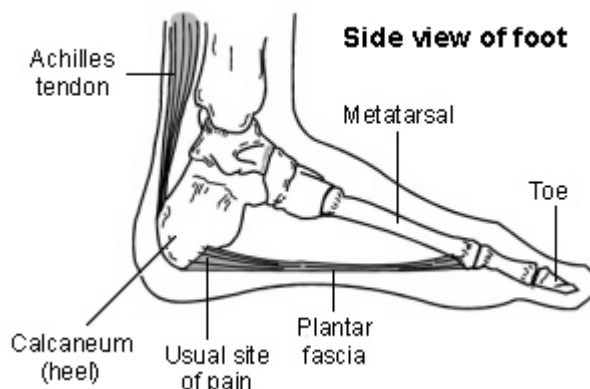
You have been diagnosed in the Emergency Department with heel pain / plantar fasciitis. This leaflet explains how to manage the condition at home.

What causes heel pain?

The heel is the largest of the 26 bones in the human foot. It is designed to provide a firm support for the weight of your body. The heel absorbs the impact when your feet hit the ground when walking and running, and it springs you forward ready for the next step. While walking, the stresses placed on your feet can be one-and-a-quarter times your body weight (this increases to two-and-three-quarters times when running). So it is not surprising that heel pain is common.

Although heel pain can be mild and will sometimes disappear on its own, in some cases the pain persists and can become a chronic problem.

Heel pain has a variety of different causes, although the most common is a condition called plantar fasciitis.



What are the symptoms?

Pain usually starts gradually without any injury to the area. Often it is triggered by wearing a flat shoe (e.g. flip flops on summer holidays). This stretches the plantar fascia (thick band of tissue that connects the heel bone to the toes) too far and begins the inflammation of the area.

Typically, pain is felt under the foot towards the front of the heel. It is common for it to start in one heel only and normally it is most painful when standing up first thing in the morning.

It can often ease with activity but then become more pronounced at the end of the day, or after a long time spent on your feet.

What is plantar fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis is caused when the plantar fascia is strained beyond its normal extension. This causes the soft tissue fibres to stretch and become inflamed, often where it is attached to the heel bone (although it sometimes happens in the middle of the foot). This results in pain, often accompanied by a cramping of the calf muscles as tightness of the Achilles tendon is a major contributory factor.

The underlying position of your foot is often to blame for this condition and therefore advice on shoes and insoles is important. A foot that flattens excessively on standing is called a 'pronating' foot and this needs to be corrected by using orthotic devices (these are special insoles or inserts to improve the way the foot functions). Plantar fasciitis is more common in people who spend all day on their feet in flat, unsupportive shoes or who are overweight.

What is the treatment for heel pain?

The best way to resolve heel pain is by doing several things at once:

- Check your footwear: avoid flat, unsupportive shoes.
- Stretch out the Achilles tendon and calf muscles.
- Use insoles and orthotics to correct any foot faults and cushion and cradle the arch while it heals.
- Use anti-inflammatory medication. If you are already taking medicines from your doctor please consult a pharmacist prior to taking any over the counter medicines.
- A visit to a podiatrist (foot specialist) for assessment may be helpful; ask your GP for advice.
- In acute or stubborn cases, hydrocortisone injections are very useful. Usually, you will need no more than three and these are administered under local anaesthetic by your GP.



Preventing heel pain

Try minimising the things that cause heel pain to start:

- Lose weight.
- Where possible, reduce the time spent on your feet.
- Wear shoes which have some padding or shock-absorbing material in the heel. You can buy heel pads in most good chemists and these will reduce the impact of walking.
- Wear shoes that fit well and aren't worn down on the heel or soles.
- If you're taking part in sports, wear appropriate shoes and warm up (and down) properly before exercising.
- If the heel pain is associated with a particular shoe, avoid wearing that pair for a while.
- Avoid walking barefoot on hard ground.
- For further information, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/plantar-fasciitis/>

Tell us your views

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your treatment and care, please speak to a senior member of staff or to the nurse looking after you. The matrons are also available during normal working hours and they welcome your views.

Friends and Family Test

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – 'Overall, how was your experience of our service?' – by going online www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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