

A Pain in the Heel

Kent Sweeting - Performance Podiatry and Physiotherapy

Pain under the heel is the most common condition that we as podiatrists see in our clinic. It has been reported to affect up to 21% of the population. It can affect physically active people such as runners or middle-aged and elderly people that are less active.

The most common problem we see causing heel pain is plantar fasciitis. The plantar fascia is similar to a long ligament that attaches to the base of the heel and runs up through the arch. This attachment point on the heel is the place where it can pull or tear away, leading to plantar fasciitis.

The classic symptom of plantar fasciitis is morning pain. Typically people with plantar fasciitis will describe unbearable pain with the first few steps they take in the morning. Often it can take minutes or even hours before the pain warms up and they can walk normally again. Pain can also come and go during the day depending on how long the person stands standing or walking. Over time, the pain will often get worse.

Plantar fasciitis is usually something that happens in people who have an abnormal walking pattern (such as the feet rolling inwards). A small amount of damage is done with every step until it gets to a point where the plantar fascia becomes slightly torn, causing pain.

Icing, calf stretching and massage of the plantar fascia (which can be felt in the arch of most people by bending the big toe back) will help to reduce the symptoms of plantar fasciitis. Custom made inserts (orthotics) may also be helpful to eliminate plantar fasciitis by correcting the way you walk or run and reducing the strain going through the plantar fascia. If you have pain under the heel, consult your podiatrist, physiotherapist or family doctor.