

Heel Pain

What causes heel pain?

The commonest cause is plantar fasciitis. The other causes are:

- Being overweight
- Being on your feet for long periods
- Nerve problems
- Stress fracture/Infection/Tumours of heel bone
- Heel joint (subtalar) arthritis

What are the symptoms of plantar fasciitis?

Pain in the heel first thing in the morning which eases with activity is a typical symptom of plantar fasciitis. It is often accompanied by tightness of the calf muscles and the Achilles tendon. It is more common in people who are on their feet for prolonged periods and those who are overweight.

What treatment options are available?

Most patients with plantar fasciitis get better with non-operative treatment. Treatment options are:

- Appropriate footwear
- Activity modification
- Pain medication
- Weight reduction
- Heel cushion/gel
- Physiotherapy to stretch calf muscles
- Shockwave therapy
- Steroid injection
- Surgery: is rarely indicated. It involves surgical release of tight calf muscle (Gastrocnemius)

What is the long term prognosis of plantar fasciitis?

Plantar fasciitis is a self-limiting condition. The symptoms resolve in 18-24 months in most cases.

What is shockwave therapy?

In this high energy acoustic waves is applied to heel. You will feel as if the head of the machine is “punching” your heel. It brings about pain relief by promoting repair/regeneration. It is a non-invasive procedure and does not involve anaesthesia. Routinely 3 to 5 sessions are needed and each session lasts 15 to 30 minutes.

What is involved in steroid injection?

In this a combination of steroid and local anaesthetic is injected to the painful spot in the heel. It is almost always done with you being awake (sedation/general anaesthetic may be needed if there is severe fear of the needle). The procedure is usually done in the clinic. Steroid injections do help most patients with heel pain but the benefit is usually shortlived. The complications of steroid injection are:

- Infection
- Nerve injury
- Steroid flare (increase in severity of pain for 24 to 72 hours)
- Numbness
- Fat atrophy
- Skin discolouration
- Allergic reaction
- Failure