

Information for Parents and Carers about Heel Pain in Children

What is Heel pain and what causes it?

Heel pain is very common in children and is sometimes referred to as Severs disease. This is a misleading name, as it is not a disease, but more a side-effect of growth. It commonly affects children going through a growth spurt when the bones grow faster than the soft tissues (muscles, ligaments and tendons). It is more common in physically active children especially those participating in running and jumping activities.

The average age when this is first detected is 11.5 years. It is more common in boys and in about 6 out of 10 patients both feet are affected.

We know that when a growth spurt occurs tightness in the calf muscles and Achilles tendon cause a pull on the heel bone leading to pain. Other symptoms can include an intermittent (irregular) limp or walking on your toes, swelling, warmth and even redness at the heel. These can be made worse when active and commonly children complain of pain after sport. The pain will improve as the growth slows down, and eventually disappear completely. Your child will not have lifelong symptoms from this.

We make a diagnosis by asking about your child's symptoms and clinical examination, your child will not need an X-ray to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

The treatment for heel pain is a combination of resting from certain activities and physiotherapy to address tight muscles. Treatment options may include:

- Activity Modification - avoiding activities that make the pain worse, especially jumping sports.
- Applying ice to the heel can help with pain and reduce any heat or redness.

Activities which may make the symptoms worse include running, jumping and high impact activities. While the pain is present, your child should completely rest from these activities and gradually re-introduce them once the pain has settled. During periods of rapid growth it is likely that the symptoms will flare back up and they may need another period of rest.

Occasionally, the calf muscles and Achilles tendon may tighten up. A physiotherapist can provide your child with calf stretches to stretch out these muscles and try and reduce the chances of this coming back in adolescence.

Summary

Heel pain is common and settles with a combination of stretching tight muscles and resting from activities which make the symptoms worse, especially jumping sports. As the pain improves physical activity can be gradually increased as comfort allows. It is not uncommon to get more than one episode of heel pain, and if your child does experience a flare in their symptoms the same advice applies. As this is a condition of childhood, once growth has completed the symptoms do not usually recur (come back).



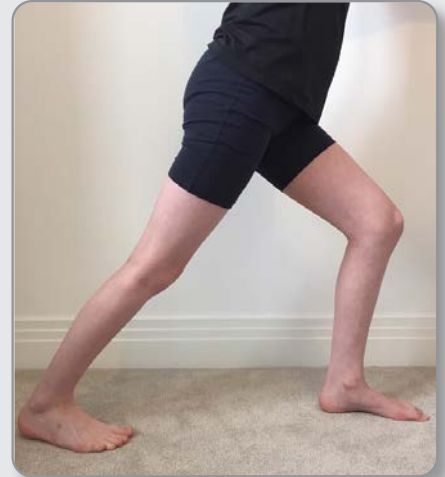
Calf Stretching Exercises

The following exercises may help your child.

Example Stretches: Your child should do these exercises for 30 seconds, 3 times each leg, twice a day.

- Stand with both hands leaning against the wall
- Bring one foot back behind you keeping your toes level and straight
- Bend the front knee and keep the back leg nice and straight
- The stretch will be felt in the back leg in the calf

Perform these for 30 seconds, 3 times each leg, twice a day.



- Stand on a step
- Stand with only the balls of your feet on the step
- Allowing your heels to drop down below the height of the step
- You will feel the stretch in the back of your calf

Perform these for 30 seconds, 3 times each leg, twice a day.

