Understanding plantar heel pain

Evidence-informed information about first-step heel pain, stretching, rehabilitation and when assessment is helpful.

Common symptom pattern

Plantar heel pain often causes discomfort with the first few steps after rest and with prolonged standing or walking. Other problems can produce similar symptoms, so persistent or unusual pain should be assessed.

What can help?

A progressive management plan may include plantar fascia and calf stretching, activity and loading modification, selected hands-on treatment, short-term taping and appropriate footwear advice. Orthoses may be used with other care, rather than as a stand-alone cure.

When might imaging help?

Imaging is not required for every case of heel pain. It can be considered when the diagnosis is uncertain, symptoms are atypical, or the result is likely to change the treatment plan.

When to seek urgent assessment

Seek prompt medical attention for severe new pain after injury, inability to weight-bear, rapidly increasing redness or swelling, fever or new neurological symptoms.

Research source

Koc, T.A. Jr., Bise, C.G., Neville, C., Carreira, D., Martin, R.L. and McDonough, C.M. (2023) “Heel pain—plantar fasciitis: Revision 2023”, Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy, 53(12), pp. CPG1–CPG39. doi:10.2519/jospt.2023.0303.

General information only. This does not replace individual clinical advice.