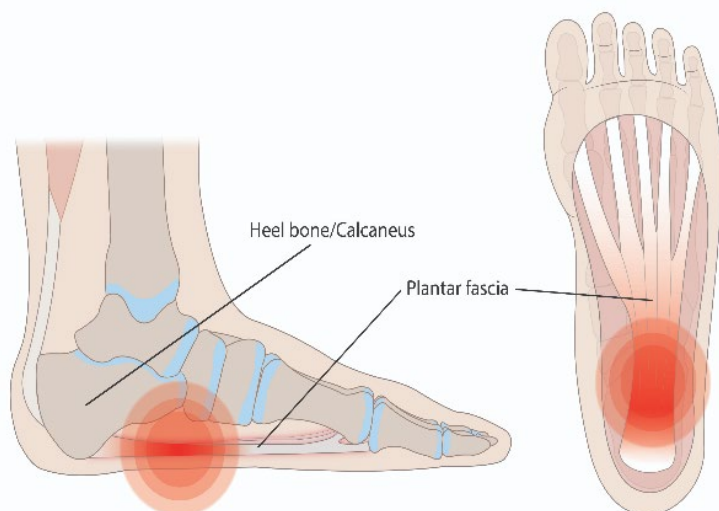


What is plantar heel pain (PHP)?

Plantar heel pain (PHP) is pain felt under the heel. The most common cause of plantar heel pain is irritation to the plantar fascia. The plantar fascia is a strong band of tissue that runs from the heel bone to the ball of the foot. This tissue helps support the arch of the foot and shock absorbs when you stand, walk, or run.

The condition usually develops when the plantar fascia is repeatedly stressed or strained. This can happen after a increase in activity or from spending long periods on your feet. Symptoms usually start gradually and build over a period of time.



PHP is very common — around 1 in 10 people will experience it at some point. Although it often affects runners, it can also occur in people who are less active.

If you feel a sharp, sudden and severe pain in your heel with activity, sometimes with a popping sensation, and notice swelling or difficulty putting weight on the foot, this may suggest a tear of the plantar fascia. In this situation, you should seek urgent assessment through A&E.

How is it diagnosed?

A healthcare professional will assess your symptoms and clinically assess you. Scans are not usually needed.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain under the heel
- Gradual onset of symptoms, that can worsen over a period of time.
- Pain and/or stiffness first thing in the morning or after sitting for a while, particularly with the first few steps of walking.
- Symptoms that can ease a little with gentle walking or light activity but may worsen with long periods of standing or walking.
- Walking or standing on hard surfaces.



What are the causes/risk factors?

- A higher body weight, particularly in people who are not regularly active
- Changes in foot position or alignment
- Heel spurs
- Tight calf muscles
- Ankle stiffness
- Unsuitable footwear or a change in footwear.
- Weakness in the muscles around the foot and ankle
- A change in activity, for example a change in job which requires more standing or an large increase in running volume.

How can you manage plantar heel pain?

Non-Operative management:

- Podiatry may include insoles and footwear advise.
- Physiotherapy can provide exercises to strengthen the muscles around the foot and ankle and provide advise on return to activities.
- Keeping to a healthy weight, which can reduce pressure on the heel.
- Adjusting activity levels to avoid overloading the foot while symptoms settle
- Cold packs to ease your symptoms.
- Shockwave therapy may be offered to help your symptoms.
- Steroid injections which may be offered if symptoms do not improve with podiatry and physiotherapy.

Do I need surgery?

Surgery is very rarely needed for plantar heel pain. Most people improve with non-surgical treatments over time. Recovery can be slow, and it often takes around 6 to 12 months for symptoms to settle.