

# The Heel Pain Handbook

A guide to  
understanding  
Heel Pain

Geelong  
**Heel Pain**  **Clinic**

# Before Reading

This is a brief guide explaining some of the common causes of Heel Pain as well information about each diagnosis.

This information is to help people understand the most common types of Heel Pain and is not a diagnosis of your pain and symptoms. Seek the advice of a Podiatrist to be prescribed the right treatment for your diagnosis.

# What can cause Heel Pain

Pain is the body's way of telling us that something is wrong. This may happen through injury or illness, but regardless of the causative factor, you need to listen and take action. Pain that occurs in our heels is no different and alerts us to seek treatment.

Because a variety of causes exist for heel pain, it is very important to have any type of heel pain properly diagnosed by a qualified podiatrist, but not just any podiatrist, you want to

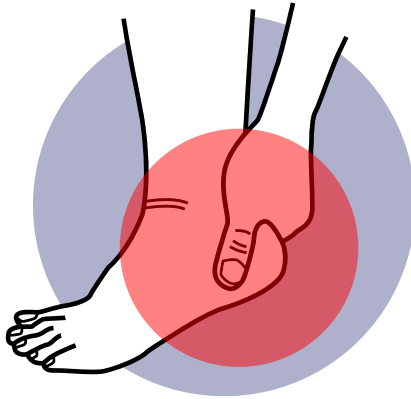
see someone that has experience in treating heel pain and you want to visit a podiatry clinic that offers varied treatment options, because every patient is different and no single treatment plan is going to suit every patient.

The foot is a very complicated structure and the heel bone is the largest of the 26 bones found in the human foot. The foot also has 33 joints and a network of more than 100 tendons, muscles, and ligaments. The heel bone is subject to an enormous amount of stress and force each day

and there are a variety of outside influences that can affect its ability to function properly.

It's interesting to note that heel pain does not present in the same area on every person and it does not follow the same patterns of symptoms. Sometimes the pain is on the bottom of the heel and at other times it will be on the back of the heel. The pain may be a sharp shooting pain, or it could present as a dull ache. Some people will say it's worse in the morning, while others will say the pain increases after they

have been standing for some time. All this variation occurs because we're not looking at one single problem or cause, there are many, so let's start looking at the most common causes of heel pain in a little more detail.



# Plantar Fasciitis (Plantar Fasciopathy)

This is by far the most common cause of heel pain seen at Geelong Heel Pain Clinic. On the bottom of the foot, there is a thick band of connective tissue called the Plantar Fascia, which runs from the heel bone to the ball of the foot. For one reason or another, this thick band tears away from the heel bone or is compressed and it is usually associated with poor

foot structure. Most commonly over pronated (flat feet) or over supinated (high arched feet). It can also be caused by wearing non-supportive footwear on hard surfaces, spending long hours on your feet at work, or obesity.

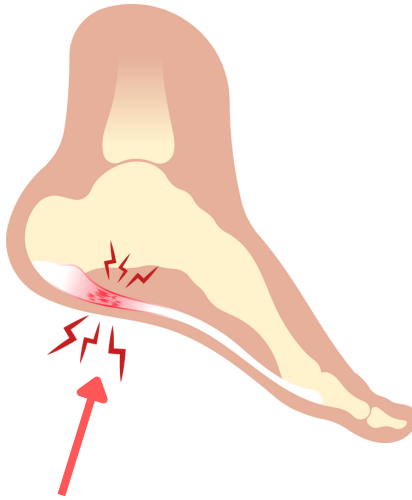
The pain from Plantar Fasciitis is usually a sharp, stabbing pain on the inside of the bottom of the heel that can feel like a knife sticking into your heel. Pain from Plantar Fasciitis is usually most severe when you first stand on your feet in the mornings, but once you get warm the pain usually



decreases. I jokingly refer to it with my patients as the “Oh Shit Phenomena”, because when you first get out of bed in the mornings you’ll say, “oh shit, oh shit oh shit” when you take your first few steps.

In some cases, it will completely subside once it’s warmed up. However, in more severe cases a throbbing pain exists all day and by the end of the day it is very difficult to stand. If this sounds like you, you should call and make an appointment to see a Podiatrist NOW, because regardless of what you’ve been

told, it will not go away in 18 months by itself. And why would you want to put up with it for 18 months?



**The Plantar Fascia attachment is the most common location for a Plantar Fascia Injury**

# Heel Spurs

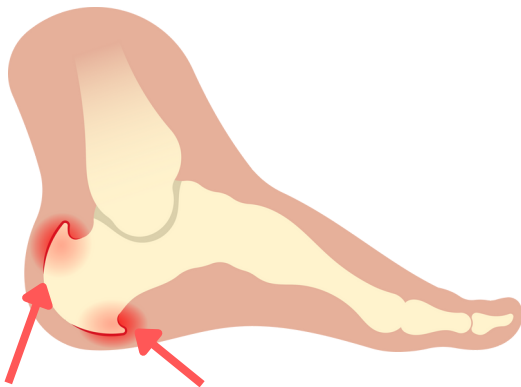
Sometimes heel spurs are found in people with Plantar Fasciitis, but they are rarely the source of the heel pain. Heel Spurs are bony growths on the underside of the heel bone caused by tension from a tight plantar fascia tendon attachment.

They result from repeated stretching of the plantar fascia and repeated tearing away from the lining or membrane that covers the heel bone. Heel Spurs will grow in the same direction as the plantar fascia

tendon attachment pulls, they do not grow downward like a spike into the soft heel pad as many people often think.

A large percentage of patients with plantar fasciitis will have a heel spur that can be seen on an X-Ray, however it is important to note that heel spurs do not develop overnight, instead, they develop slowly over many months and years. Therefore if you've only recently developed heel pain, say for the past week or month, and have previously never had these symptoms before, it is very

unlikely that you will have a heel spur, and even if you do you can rest assured it's not causing your heel pain. Because of the confusion between Plantar Fasciitis and Heel Spurs, patients are given poor advice from uninformed health practitioners and this can lead to mismanagement.



Site of common Heel Spur growth

# Achilles Tendonitis (Achilles Tendinopathy)

The Achilles tendon is the largest and strongest tendon in the human body and it connects the calf muscles in the back of your lower leg to the heel bone.

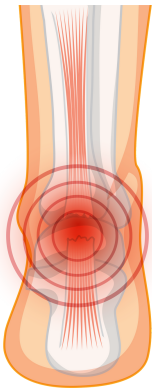
It is a very strong tendon; however, it is also the tendon we most often injured. Micro-damage occurs in the tendon if overused, resulting in tendonitis.

However, the Achilles tendon can also tear if it has enough force applied to it. Runners often suffer from Achilles Tendonitis problems, but it can

occur in the any sport, and it can also occur in people who are not overly active. Symptoms of Achilles tendonitis vary considerably depending on the severity.

Often it may present as mild pain after exercise or running that gradually worsens over many weeks or months, eventually leading to a burning pain or even a sharp piercing pain that simply stops you in your tracks. The pain can be very localised at the tendon attachment to the back of the heel, or it may run up through

the tendon towards the calf muscle. Achilles Tendonitis can even make simple walking quite difficult, and some people may even develop lumps in the Achilles tendon which are very painful to squeeze from the side. If you're at this stage you need to seek professional podiatry help now, because it's not going away.



Common area of swelling and pain within the tendon



# Posterior Heel Bursitis

There are several fluid-filled sacs, called Bursas, that are positioned behind the heel bone that act as a cushion and a lubricant for the Achilles Tendon. Repetitive or over use of the ankle can cause the bursa to become inflamed or irritated leading to heel bursa inflammation, or Bursitis. The condition is often mistaken for Achilles Tendonitis. Symptoms include pain in the heel, especially when walking, running, or jumping or when the area is touched or accidentally hit. The skin around the back of the heel may be red,

swollen and warm to the touch, and the pain may be worse when standing on your toes as it compresses the inflamed Bursa. Footwear that places pressure on the back of the heels will often make it worse.



Inflammation of the Bursa

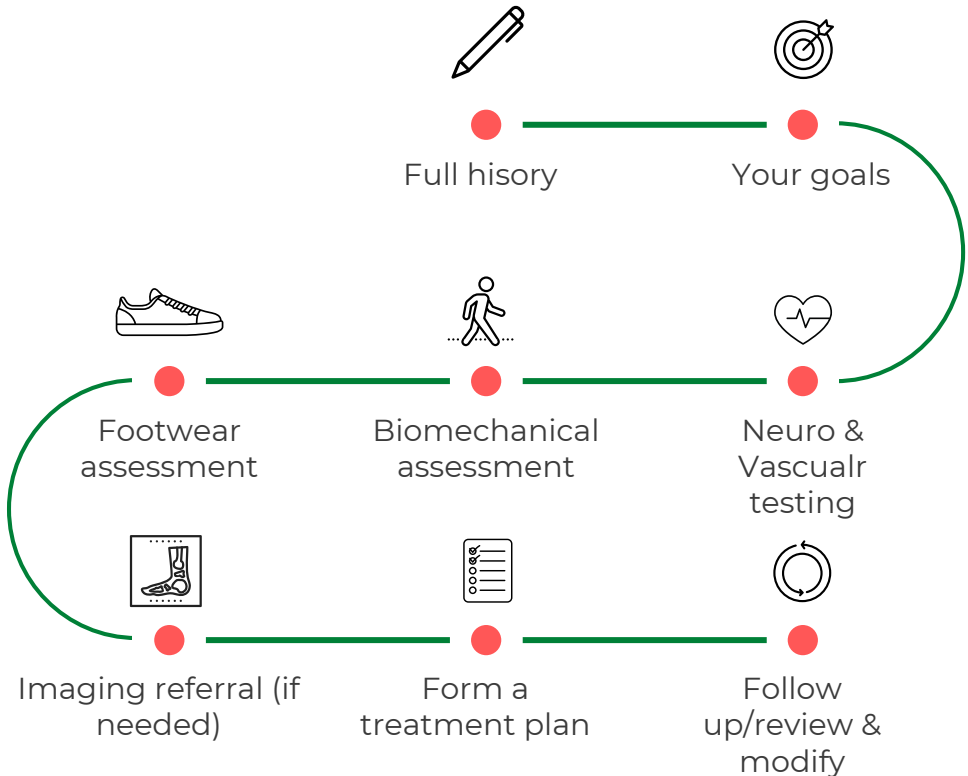
# Treatment Options

Treatment for pain in and around the heel will vary from person to person based on the, diagnosis, patient goals, age, mobility, medical history, sport, work and many others.

In short, not everyone goes down the exact treatment pathway.

Our treatment pathways generally start similarly for most people, then modified based on the above factors and how they respond to certain treatments.

# Your Heel Pain Assessment Appointment



**Build back up**

**Calm things down**

## Treatments

Modify load/set goals/change treatment

Immobilisation

Taping

Shockwave

Foot Orthoses

Stretching

Footwear Change

Build Strength & Loaf

# How Long Does It Take To Feel Better?

Time to complete resolution for pain around the heel will vary from person to person.

As a general rule, *the longer it has been around, the longer it can take to improve.*

Symptoms lasting for 3 months or longer are considered to be chronic and over this period it can take longer to improve.

The common pain and stiffness getting out of bed in the morning can be a lingering

symptom that gradually reduces. The first noted improvement people feel is being able to walk, run, work longer without discomfort.

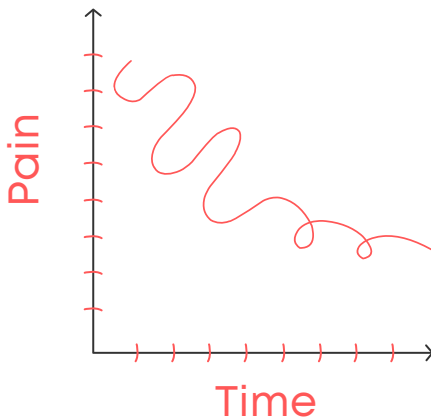
Following that, the after rest pain will improve followed by the morning pain and stiffness.

However, improvement is never consistent and flow in peaks and troughs.

You will notice some improvements some days then it will feel like it has gone backwards on others. This is very common and to be expected.

It will seem like you are **taking 2 steps forward and 1 step back**, but know you will always be trending in the right direction.

Before starting your treatment it may have going 1 step forward and 1 step back, not going anywhere or even getting worse. The point is that the path to feeling better can be slow and uneven for some, but stick to the plan and you well reach the other side.





If you are ready to take the next step in resolving your heel pain, The Geelong Heel Pain Clinic at PhysioPod Co. is here to help.

To book an appointment you can go to our website and click the **BOOK ONLINE** button or call **5269 9635**.