



## Treatment causes

Treatment for heel pain usually involves trying a combination of techniques, such as painkillers and exercise, to relieve pain and speed up your recovery time. Surgery is usually regarded as a 'treatment of last resort' and is not a guarantee of effective treatment.

### 1. Rest

Rest the affected foot whenever possible by avoiding standing for long periods of time or walking long distances. However, it is important to regularly exercise your feet and calves with stretching exercises. See our stretching exercise leaflet for more information.

### 2. Pain relief

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, are a type of painkilling medication that are usually effective in helping to relieve pain.

### 3. Icepacks

Some people also find that applying an ice pack to the affected heel for 5 to 10 minutes can help to relieve pain and inflammation. Ice packs are available from larger pharmacies and supermarkets. Do not apply the ice pack directly to the area because this can damage the skin. Instead, wrap the ice pack in a towel. If you do not have an ice pack, use a packet of frozen vegetables.

### 4. Exercise

Regular exercises designed to stretch both your calf muscles and your plantar fascia (band of tissue that runs under the sole of the foot) should help relieve pain and improve flexibility in the affected foot. A number of exercises are described in the

stretching exercise leaflet. It is usually recommended that you do the exercises on both legs, even if only one of your heels is affected by pain. This will improve your balance and stability, as well as helping to relieve heel pain.

## 5. Footwear

Depending on your usual choice of footwear, your GP or podiatrist may advise you to change your footwear. Avoid wearing flat-soled shoes as these will provide no support to your heel and could make pain worse. Ideally, you should be wearing shoes that provide good support to the arches of your feet while cushioning your heels, such as laced-up sport shoes.

For women, wearing high heels and, for men, wearing high-heeled boots or brogues can provide short- to moderate-term relief of pain, as they help reduce the pressure on the heel. But these types of footwear may not be suitable in the long-term, as they can lead to further episodes of heel pain. Your GP or podiatrist should be able to advise you.

## 6. Orthoses/ Insoles

Orthoses are in-soles that fit inside your shoe to support your foot and assist the healing of your heel. You can buy orthoses off the shelf at larger pharmacies or sports shops. If your pain keeps reoccurring, does not respond to simple treatment measures, or you have an abnormal foot shape or structure, custom-made orthoses are available. They are specifically made to fit the shape of your feet. However, there is currently no evidence that the custom-made orthoses are more effective than those bought off the shelf.

## Strapping and splinting

An alternative to using orthoses is to have your heel strapped with sports strapping (zinc oxide) tape. The strapping will help to relieve pressure on your heel. Your GP or podiatrist should be able to teach you how to apply the straps yourself. Night splints can also be useful in some cases. Most people sleep with their toes pointing down, which means that the tissue inside the heel is squeezed together. Night splints, which look like a type of boot, are designed to keep the toes and feet pointing up during sleep. This will stretch both the Achilles tendon and your plantar fascia while you sleep, which should help speed up your recovery time. See your G.P. about this.

## Corticosteroid injections

If none of the treatments above help to relieve your pain symptoms, your GP may recommend that you have an injection of corticosteroids.

Corticosteroids are a type of medication that have a powerful anti-inflammatory effect. They have to be used sparingly because overuse can cause serious side effects, such as weight gain and high blood pressure (hypertension).

As a result of this, it is not usually recommended that more than three corticosteroid injections are given within a year in any part of the body.