

Is It Plantar Fasciitis or Something Else?

Understanding your heel pain and what it might really mean



WHY THIS MATTERS

Heel pain can stop you in your tracks – and while it's commonly called plantar fasciitis, there are actually several conditions that can cause pain in this area.

Getting the right diagnosis early can save you weeks (or months) of frustration and help you recover faster.

This guide will help you understand what plantar heel pain feels like, how it differs from other causes of heel pain, and when to seek help.

CLASSIC SIGNS OF PLANTAR HEEL PAIN

Plantar heel pain (often referred to as plantar fasciitis) is the most common cause of heel pain – affecting over 1 in 10 people at some point in their lives. Here's what it typically looks like:

- **Pain under the heel**, especially near the front of the heel bone
- **Sharp or stabbing pain first thing in the morning** or after long periods of rest (e.g., sitting or driving)
- **Eases with gentle movement**, then worsens again if you do too much
- **Often linked to long hours standing, walking, running, or poor footwear**

Key clue:

The "first step in the morning" pain is one of the most classic signs.

OTHER CONDITIONS THAT MIMIC PLANTAR HEEL PAIN

If your pain isn't improving – or doesn't quite fit the classic pattern – it's worth considering other possibilities:

1 Heel Fat Pad Syndrome

- Pain feels like a deep bruise directly under the heel

- Worse on hard surfaces or when barefoot
- Less associated with morning pain – more about pressure impact
- Common in older adults or those with reduced fat padding under the heel

2 Insertional Achilles Tendinopathy

- Pain at the back of the heel (not underneath)
- Stiff and sore in the morning, especially when walking uphill or climbing stairs
- Tender to touch where the Achilles tendon attaches to the heel
- May have a visible bump or thickening at the back of the heel

3 Nerve Entrapment or Tarsal Tunnel Syndrome

- Burning, tingling, or numbness in the heel or arch
- May shoot into the toes or up the leg
- Worse at night or after standing for long periods
- Less common, but important to rule out

4 Stress Fracture (rare, but serious)

- Constant, deep pain that worsens with activity
- Doesn't ease with rest – and may get worse over time

- May be linked to a recent increase in training or impact activity
- Often needs imaging to confirm (e.g. MRI)

WHEN SHOULD YOU SEE SOMEONE?

You don't need to panic – but don't ignore it either.

See a trained professional if:

- Your heel pain isn't improving after 2-3 weeks of gentle care
- You've had a sudden increase in symptoms
- Pain is spreading, burning, or feels "weird"
- You feel unsure about what's causing it

A physiotherapist, osteopath, chiropractor, sports therapist, or podiatrist can assess your movement, history, and pain pattern to pinpoint the cause.

FINAL THOUGHT

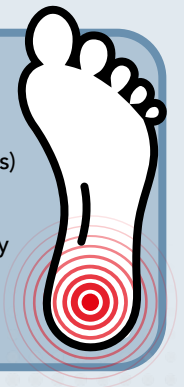
It's not just "a sore foot." And it's not something you need to figure out alone.

Most heel pain – whether it's plantar heel pain or something else – can be managed with the right approach.

Getting clarity early can make all the difference.

What Pain Where?

Pain Location	Possible Cause
Under the heel (front)	Plantar heel pain (plantar fasciitis)
Directly under centre of heel	Fat pad syndrome
Back of heel	Insertional Achilles tendinopathy
Heel + burning/numbness	Nerve involvement
Heel pain + worsening with load	Stress fracture (rare)



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