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Sever's Disease Heel pain in children

What is it?

Sever's is an irritation to the growing area at the back of the heel bone (the Calcaneus) where the strong Achilles tendon attaches to it. This is known as Sever's disease or calcaneal apophysitis (inflammation of the growth plate). It is most common between the ages of 10 to 14 years of age.

Symptoms

- Pain at the heel or around the Achilles tendon
- Heel pain during physical exercise, especially activities that require running or jumping
- Worsening of pain after exercise
- A tender swelling or bulge on the heel that is sore to touch
- Calf muscle stiffness first thing in the morning
- Limping
- A tendency to tiptoe.

Cause

Apart from age, other factors that may contribute to developing Sever's disease include:

- Physical activity – any form of exercise that is weight bearing through the legs or stresses the soft tissue can exacerbate the pain of the disease
- External factors – for example, running on hard surfaces or wearing inappropriate shoes during sport
- Overuse injury – very active children may repeatedly but subtly injure the bones, muscles and tendons of their feet and ankles. In time, the accumulated injuries cause symptom

Treatment

- Cold packs. Icing after activity will help reduce inflammation and pain
- Cut back on sporting activities - don't stop, just reduce.
- Avoid going barefoot.
- Your Podiatrist can fit you with some heel raises and possibly an orthotic insole (this reduces the pull from the calf muscles on the growth plate and increases the shock absorption, so the growth plate is not stressed as much).
- Stretch and strengthening exercises
- Strapping or tape is sometimes used during activity to limit the ankle joint
- Splinting or casting

After the pain from Sever's disease resolves, prevention with the use of stretching, good supportive shock absorbing shoes and orthotics to address pronation are important to help prevent the return of symptoms.

Practitioner's Notes:

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