

A GUIDE TO CALCANEAL APOPHYSITIS (SEVER'S DISEASE)

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What is calcaneal apophysitis?

The heel bone is called the calcaneus. In children, there is an area on the heel bone where the bone grows that is called the growth plate, or apophysis. Calcaneal apophysitis, also called Sever's Disease, is inflammation of the calcaneal growth plate that causes pain in the heel. It is the most common cause of heel pain in children, adolescents, and teenagers.

How does it occur?

This inflamed heel growth plate is caused by overusing the foot with repetitive heel strikes. It may also occur from wearing shoes with poor heel padding or poor arch supports.

What are the symptoms?

A child will complain of heel pain. Running and jumping usually increase the symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will find tenderness over the bottom part of your child's heel. In severe cases of calcaneal apophysitis, the doctor may order an x-ray to be sure there is no damage to the growth plate.

How is it treated?

Your child may need to rest or do activities that do not cause heel pain. It is very important that your child wear shoes with padded heel surfaces and good arch supports. Extra heel pads may be placed in your child's shoe. Orthotics (custom-made arch supports) may be helpful. Your doctor may also prescribe an anti-inflammatory medication for your child. You can ice the heel after activities to help with the inflammation.

When can my child return to his or her sport or activity?

The goal of treatment is to return your child to his or her sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If your child returns too soon the injury may be made worse, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to his or her activity will be determined by how soon your child's heel recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since the injury occurred. In general, the longer your child has symptoms before starting treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

How can calcaneal apophysitis be prevented?

Calcaneal apophysitis is best prevented by having your child wear shoes that fit properly. The heel portion of the shoe should not be too tight, and there should be good padding in the heel. You may want to put extra heel pads in your child's shoe.