

Why does my child have heel pain?

Heel pain in a child is not normal and should be evaluated by a podiatrist promptly. Heel pain in child is usually due to an injury in the heel, not from inflammation like in the adult. What gets injured in the child's heel is the growth plates. These are the cartilage between the bones that get injured. As a child grows the heel bone is not completely fused and an area of injury in the heel bone is where two pieces of bone fuse to become one. The typical age range for this problem is between ten and fourteen years old. Typically heel pain in children occurs in girls between 8 and 10 and boys between 10 to 12 years of age. It is not until an adolescent turns around sixteen that the area completely fuses.

Severs disease or calcaneal apophysitis is another cause of heel pain in children. The typical pain is around the sides of the heel, back of the heel or on the bottom of the heel. We typically will note if the pain increases with activity; especially with sporting activities. The pain will lead to tightness of various muscles because the body is compensating for the heel pain. Achilles tendonitis commonly occurs along with the heel pain in the foot. Because the Achilles can get so tight it can end up traumatizing the bone and cause an injury of the growth plate. This is because the pressure of this extremely strong tendon is against their heel bone.

Treatment promptly by a podiatrist is necessary for heel pain in children to decipher whether there is an interruption in the growth plate or a real fracture, which is quite rare. A foot specialist will take an x-ray and evaluate the bony structures of the foot and ankle area. Once they are diagnosed with Severs disease or osteochondritis (inflammation of the cartilage) the main focus is to decrease activity. We typically don't recommend a complete cessation of activity, just decrease in physical sporting activity. Icing the heel area for intervals of twenty minutes three times a day can help immensely. Heel cups, which are shock absorbers, may be of some benefit. In our practice we typically recommend custom orthotics for the treatment of calcaneus apophysitis. If they are casted correctly they will effectively control the foot and ankle motion and decrease pressure in the heel area. Custom orthotics can effectively decrease pressure of the Achilles tendon on the heel bone. Foot doctors that specialize in pediatric foot problems would probably be the best specialist to go see with a problem such as this.