

Sever's Disease

What is Sever's Disease?

Sever's disease, also called **calcaneal apophysitis**, is a common cause of heel pain in growing children and teens. It occurs when the **growth plate at the back of the heel bone becomes irritated**. During periods of rapid growth, the bones, muscles, and tendons may grow at different rates. Repetitive running, jumping, and other high-impact activities can place extra stress on the growth plate where the Achilles tendon attaches.

Sever's disease is an **overuse injury—not a disease or infection—and it does not cause permanent damage to the heel**. It is most common in active children approximately **8–15 years old**, particularly during periods of rapid growth.

What Are the Symptoms?

Common symptoms include:

- **Pain or tenderness at the back or bottom of the heel**
- Pain that is worse with **running, jumping, or sports**
- Pain that improves with rest
- Limping or walking differently because of heel pain
- Tightness in the calf or Achilles tendon
- Pain when the sides or back of the heel are squeezed

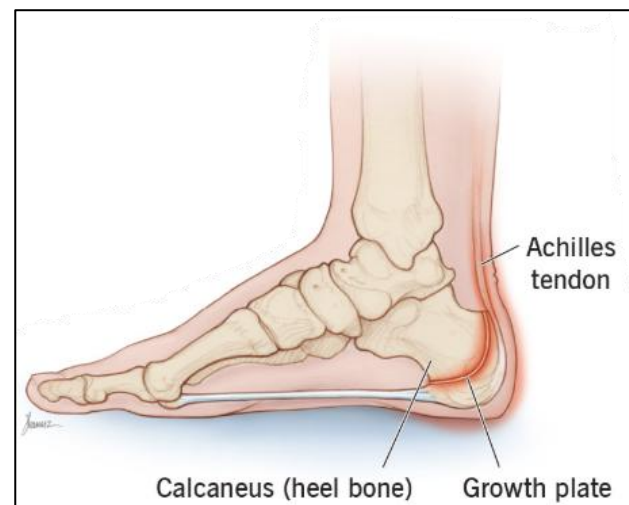
Sever's disease usually affects **one or both heels**. Symptoms may come and go and can become worse during periods of increased sports activity or rapid growth.

What is the cause?

Sever's disease is usually caused by a combination of:

- **Rapid growth**
- Tight calf muscles or Achilles tendons
- Repetitive running and jumping
- Increased sports activity or training
- Activities on hard surfaces
- Wearing shoes with poor cushioning or support

It is especially common when a child suddenly increases the amount or intensity of their activity.



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How Long Does It Last?

Sever's disease usually improves as the irritated growth plate is given time to calm down. Symptoms may improve within a few weeks, but they can sometimes come and go for several months, particularly if a child continues activities that cause significant pain. Sever's disease generally resolves once the heel growth plate finishes developing. The goal is not necessarily complete rest—it is to reduce activities that cause significant pain while maintaining safe activity as symptoms improve.



At-Home Care for Sever's Disease

Activity modification

Your child does not always need to stop all physical activity.

- Avoid or reduce activities that cause significant heel pain, especially running and jumping.
- Lower-impact activities such as swimming or cycling may be better tolerated.
- Gradually return to sports as pain improves.
- If pain causes limping, your child should take a break from running and jumping until they can walk normally without pain.

Ice and Stretching

- Apply a cold pack wrapped in a towel to the heel for 15–20 minutes after activity or when painful. Do not place ice directly on the skin.
- Gentle stretching of the calf and Achilles tendon can help reduce stress on the heel. Stretching should be comfortable and should not cause significant pain.

Shoes and heel support

- Supportive, well-cushioned athletic shoes can help decrease stress on the heel.
- Heel cups or heel lifts may also help
- Avoiding prolonged barefoot walking on hard surfaces

Pain relief

- *Ibuprofen* or *acetaminophen* can help with pain when appropriate for your child. Scan the QR code or review dosing on [our website](#).
- Pain medicine should not be used to allow your child to continue an activity that is causing significant pain.



When Can My Child Return to Sports?

Your child can gradually return to sports when:

- They can walk normally without pain or limping
- Daily activities are comfortable
- They can perform activities such as hopping or jogging without significant heel pain
- Symptoms do not worsen during or after activity

Start slowly and increase activity gradually.

Some soreness after activity can occur, but increasing pain or limping means your child is doing too much and should reduce activity..

Contact us for an evaluation if:

- Heel pain is severe or worsening
- Your child is limping or having difficulty walking
- Pain is not improving with activity modification and home care
- Pain continues to interfere with sports or normal activities
- Pain occurs at rest or wakes your child from sleep
- There was a specific injury or fall that may have caused something other than Sever's disease
- You are unsure whether the symptoms are from Sever's disease or another condition