

Pain in the Top of the Foot



What is Pain in the Top of the Foot?

Pain on the top (dorsum) of the foot can be caused by injury, overuse, or underlying conditions affecting the bones, joints, tendons, or nerves.

Common Causes

- **Extensor tendonitis** – inflammation of the tendons on top of the foot

- **Stress fractures** – small cracks in the bones due to repetitive impact
 - **Nerve irritation** – compression or entrapment of nerves
 - **Arthritis** – inflammation of the foot joints
 - **Ganglion cysts** – fluid-filled lumps causing pressure and discomfort
 - **Footwear issues** – tight or poorly fitted shoes
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Who Gets It?

- Runners or athletes
 - People who stand or walk for long periods
 - Individuals with **high arches** or **flat feet**
 - Older adults with **arthritis** or **degenerative changes**
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Symptoms

- Pain or tenderness on the top of the foot
 - Swelling or redness
 - Stiffness or difficulty moving the foot or toes
 - Pain during walking, running, or wearing shoes
 - Numbness or tingling if nerves are involved
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Self-Care & Home Management

- **Rest** – avoid activities that worsen the pain
 - **Ice therapy** – 10–15 minutes, 2–3 times daily
 - **Footwear** – wear comfortable shoes with good support
 - **Elevation** – raise your foot when resting to reduce swelling
 - **Pain relief** – paracetamol or NSAIDs if safe for you
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Exercises

1. **Toe Extension and Flexion:** Slowly move toes up and down 10–15 times

2. **Towel Scrunches:** Pull a towel toward you using your toes, repeat 10–15 times
3. **Calf Stretch:** Lean against a wall with back leg straight, heel on the ground, hold 20–30 seconds

A physiotherapist can provide **specific exercises** tailored to your condition.

When to See a Physiotherapist or Doctor

- Pain **does not improve** after 1–2 weeks of self-care
 - Swelling, bruising, or deformity
 - Difficulty walking or performing daily activities
 - Persistent numbness, tingling, or weakness
 - Suspected **stress fracture or nerve problem**
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Treatment Physiotherapists May Offer

- Hands-on treatment: **massage, stretching, mobilization**
 - **Exercise program** for strength and flexibility
 - Advice on **footwear, orthotics, and activity modification**
 - Taping or splints to **support and reduce pressure**
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Prognosis

Most top-of-foot pain improves with **conservative care** over a few weeks. Early treatment and following exercises reduce the risk of **chronic pain or functional problems**.

References

- NHS – Foot Pain: www.nhs.uk/conditions/foot-pain
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy – Foot & Ankle Guidance