Retrocalcaneal bursitis

Insertional heel pain

Retrocalcaneal bursitis is swelling (inflammation) of the fluid-filled sac (bursa) at the back of the heel bone (calcaneus) under the Achilles tendon.

Causes, incidence, and risk factors

A bursa acts as a cushion and lubricant between tendons and muscles sliding over bone. There are bursas around most large joints in the body, including the ankle.

The retrocalcaneal bursa is located in the back of the ankle by the heel. It is where the large Achilles tendon connects the calf muscles to the heel bone.

Repeated stretching or too much use of the ankle can cause this bursa to become irritated and inflamed. Possible causes are too much walking, running, jumping or over stretching.

It is sometimes associated with prominent bone formation at the back of the heel known as a Haglunds deformity. This increases the risk of friction on this structure.

This condition can be linked to Achilles tendinopathies. Sometimes retrocalcaneal bursitis may be mistaken for Achilles tendon issues.

Management

Settling the inflammatory response in the early phase will alleviate pain. Physiotherapy treatment may consist of:

- Release of tight associated soft tissue
- Ultra sound
- Acupuncture
- Ice cupping
- Orthotic prescription and correction of biomechanical abnormalities

Difficult ones may require medical intervention which could include local cortisone injection or surgical decompression.