

Achilles tendinopathy (non-insertional)

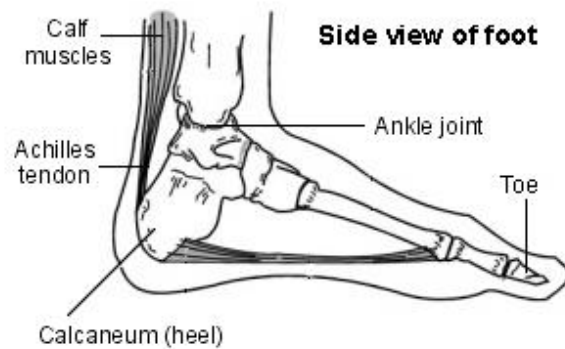
Trauma and Orthopaedic

Information for patients and carers

• Home • Community • Hospital
Caring for you

What is Achilles tendinopathy?

The Achilles tendon is the large tendon at the back of the ankle. It connects your calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the heel bone. Over time, the Achilles tendon can become damaged, this is called Achilles tendinopathy.



Causes

Achilles tendinopathy is caused by repeated micro-trauma or overloading on the tendon. Common causes include:

- overuse of the tendon such as running, dancing, or sports
- walking for long periods in poor footwear
- having poor flexibility, such as tight and underdeveloped calf muscles or hamstrings
- conditions such as diabetes, arthritis and obesity
- injury to the tendon

This causes the tendon to become thicker and swollen, usually a few centimetres above where it inserts into the heel bone (calcaneum).

An ultrasound or MRI scan can be used to help confirm the diagnosis.

Symptoms

The main symptoms include:

- pain
- swelling
- stiffness
- weakness in the Achilles tendon

These symptoms usually develop slowly and are often worse when you first wake up in the morning or after exercise.

You may notice pain at the beginning of exercise, which may ease and become bearable, then becomes worse once you stop.

Treatment

As a first line of treatment, the following techniques may provide benefits:

Relative rest

Complete rest is not advised as some stress is needed to keep the foot bones and soft tissues healthy.

Exercise is also important for weight loss management. This, in turn, reduces stress on the foot.

You should:

- avoid running
- avoid long period of standing or walking
- avoid high impact activities

These can be replaced with low impact exercises such as swimming or cycling. You can slowly return to normal activity once your symptoms and pain start to improve.

Medication

Over the counter pain relief, such as ibuprofen, may help in the early stages to reduce pain and swelling.

Ice

Ice can help reduce pain and swelling.

- Apply ice / cold packs for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Use a damp cloth between the pack and your skin.
- Leave at least two hours between treatments.

Physiotherapy

Regular stretching exercises can help to improve your pain and symptoms.

Around 8 out of 10 patients find the pain eases with these exercises. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds and repeat three times.



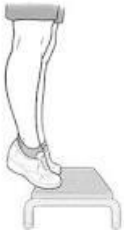
Calf stretches

Place the sore foot behind, keep the back leg straight and bend the front knee. Lean forward and stretch the back of the calf.



Eccentric exercise

Stand on a step with both heels over the edge. Rise up onto your tiptoes.



Then slowly let the weight of your body stretch your heels towards the floor for 30 seconds.

Footwear

Avoid walking barefoot. Use well-cushioned shoes for comfort and shock absorption.

Orthotics

A support brace, such as an AchilloTrain, may help to reduce irritation to the Achilles tendon through support and compression.

Other treatment options

Dry needling

This may be offered if your symptoms do not improve after other treatments. A fine needle is placed into the tendon using ultrasound. This causes mild trauma and helps to improve blood flow and encourage healing.

Surgery

Surgery is rarely needed. It is only offered to a small number of patients whose symptoms do not improve after 12 to 18 months of treatment. Surgery involves

opening the Achilles tendon, removing the damaged tissue and repairing the tendon. Your leg will be in a plaster support for four to six weeks after the surgery.

Further information

Please let staff know of any concerns or questions you may have. We will do our best to answer your queries quickly.