

Achilles tendinopathy

An Achilles tendinopathy is an over-use injury. It tends to occur as a reaction to an increased demand on the tendon, beyond its capabilities. Those with Achilles tendinopathy will typically report pain and stiffness, which may reduce in the short term with brief gentle movement.

The Achilles tendon lies at the back of your ankle. It is a thick, fibrous tissue that attaches your calf muscle to your heel. The function of the tendon is to transmit the forces of the calf muscle to your foot, allowing you to do movements such as point your toes, run and jump.

Those who have recently become more active, such as taking up jogging or a jumping sport, can commonly encounter an Achilles tendinopathy. A change of footwear, particularly to unsupportive flat shoes, can also trigger the condition.



The pain tends to increase when a load is placed through the tendon after periods of immobility, such as first thing in the morning or stepping out of the car after a long drive.

Treating an Achilles tendinopathy yourself is very simple, but you have to be patient and strict with your regime. First and foremost, you must reduce the activities that irritate your tendon. If stress continues to be placed on the tissues, the tendon will become more and more inflamed. Substitute weight bearing sport for activities such as swimming and cycling to maintain your fitness. And wear shoes that support the inner arch of your foot, ensuring you tie your laces securely.



Improving blood flow to the area can help to stimulate the healing process. Place a hot water bottle over your Achilles to reduce the stiffness you feel when the tendon has not been used for some time.



Massage around the tendon can also help with circulatory flow. Start gently, then increase the pressure as the tissues begin to warm up. Once the tissues are warmed, apply more pressure, rubbing across the tendon. An anti-inflammatory gel can be used in isolation, or as a combination with these massage techniques.

If you have been sedentary for some time, circle your ankles one way and then the other, and pull your toes up and down. This will help loosen up your Achilles before you walk on it.

Heat and massage should only be used on a stiff, cold tendon, and NOT when the tendon is irritated after too much activity.



If the tendon has been irritated, help to settle it by wrapping some ice in a damp towel, and positioning it on the painful area for 10-15 minutes. This will help to settle the inflammation. Monitor your skin to ensure the ice does not burn.

With perseverance, over time your symptoms should reduce in intensity. It is important to increase your movement with stretches, and build some strength back into your Achilles tendon. Your clinician will guide you through the specific exercises which are often best done little and often throughout the day to avoid provoking your pain too much.