



AT Exercise & Information

Achilles Tendinopathy

Your Achilles is the biggest and strongest tendon in your body. It is found at back of the lower leg, it attaches your two calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the heel bone and helps you go onto your tip toes



Causes

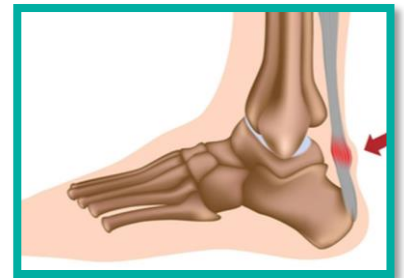
What causes Achilles tendinopathy is still not fully understood, but we know tendinopathy occurs when a tendon is unable to adapt to the strain being placed upon it. This leads to repeated small amounts of irritation within the tendon fibres and results in the tendon trying to heal itself in response to the strain. Sometimes you will hear the condition called Achilles tendinitis or tendinosis, these terms are used by people to mean the same thing as tendinopathy.

Risk factors for Achilles tendinopathy;

- Age – being over 30
- Gender – more common in men
- Weight – being overweight increases your chances of developing tendinopathy
- Being diabetic
- Tight or weak calf muscles
- Common training errors– Running or walking too far.
- Inadequate rest
- Poor quality footwear
- Too much hill training

Symptoms

- Pain – on the Achilles or heel
- Swelling in the tendon or a small lump
- Stiffness and pain in the morning or after a period of rest – when first walking on it
- Pain after exertion– such as walking or running.



Management

- Active Rest – modify or break up your physical activities to reduce
- Pain relief – such as ice, heat, or medication
- Stretch Exercises
- Strength Exercises.
- Gradual return to sport– running, walking etc

Achilles tendons can take months anywhere from 3-6 to fully improve. With guidance from your physiotherapist/podiatrist your symptoms should settle.

Scans or x-rays are not usually required to diagnose your Achilles tendinopathy. If a scan is needed it is likely to be an ultrasound scan.

Pain Management

Pain Relief

Over the counter pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication can be used to reduce your pain so you can be more active or complete your exercises.

All medications have side effects and must be used carefully. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the most common over the counter pain killers. However, some medical conditions will prevent you from taking them so you should always check with your GP or Pharmacist to ensure they are safe for you.

If you decide to take pain medication it is important to take them at the recommended dose and to take them regularly to prevent a flare up of your symptoms and allow you to remain active and continue exercising.

Ice/Heat

Using Ice to cool or Heat to warm the painful area can be helpful in managing pain and can help the healing process. The smaller the body area the less time you will need to keep the ice or heat on. Start with 5 minutes but no more than 15/20 minutes per body part.

Use a damp towel between yourself and ice to prevent any cold burns. Use a dry towel between yourself and the heat to prevent heat burns. Regularly check your skin while using ice or heat and remove immediately if any burns or injury occurs. Only use heat/ice if your skin sensation is normal.

Use Ice for Pain relief or after activity/exercise.

Use heat for pain relief or before activity/exercise.

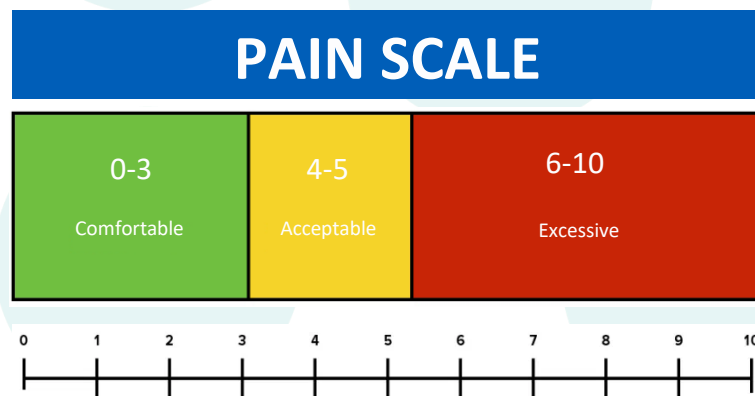
Exercise

If experiencing excessive pain then you can modify the exercise, and then slowly build it back up over time;

- Reduce the range of movement
- Reduce repetitions
- Reduce the resistance/weight being used
- Slower, less intensity and control the movement more
- Increase the rest between each set of exercises

Progress onto the next stage of exercise once they become easier and you are able to fully complete the exercises in the comfortable zone of the pain scale.

- Pain after exercise should settle to your pre exercise levels within 30-60 minutes.
- Pain or stiffness the next morning should not last longer than 60 minutes.
- Use your pain relief, ice/heat or anything else you have found that eases your symptoms to help.



Stage 1



Calf Raises Two Legs

Stand upright and hold onto a wall/table for balance if required. Slowly raise up onto your toes and control the movement back down. This exercise will strengthen the calf muscles and ankle joints.

Repeat 10-15 times | Perform 3 times daily

Calf Raises with Knees Bent

Stand up with your knees bent and rise onto your toes and hold. Slowly control the movement back down. This is a strengthening exercise for the soleus (lower calf) muscle.

Repeat 10-15 times | Perform 3 times daily



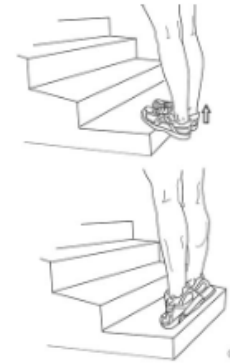


Stage 2

Calf Raises

Step Stand on a step, hold onto a handrail for balance if required. Slowly raise up onto your toes and control the movement back down just below the level of the step. This exercise will strengthen the calf muscles and ankle joints, but at the bottom of the movement put a stretch through the calves as well.

Repeat 10-15 times | Perform 3 times daily



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Calf Raise with Knees Bent

Step Two Legs Stand with your toes on the edge of a step with your knee bent. Rise up onto your toes and hold. Slowly control the movement back down. This is a strengthening and stretching exercise for the soleus (lower calf) muscle.

Repeat 10-15 times | Perform 3 times daily

Gastrocnemius Stretch

Single Leg Stand facing a wall, with your hands resting on the wall. Move one leg forwards and gently bend your knee, this will be the passive leg and just there for support. The leg you will be stretching will remain straight with your heel on the ground. You should feel a stretch to the leg at the back, in the calf muscle (known as the gastrocnemius).

Hold for 60 seconds | Repeat 3 times | Perform 4 times daily



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Soleus Stretch

Stand facing a wall, place one leg in front of you and your hands flat against the wall. Keep both heels on the ground, and your front knee bent. Push your front knee forward towards the wall to feel a stretch in the lower back part of the leg (bottom of the calf muscle, known as the soleus).

Hold for 60 seconds | Repeat 3 times | Perform 4 times daily

Further Information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tendonitis/>