

Achilles Tendon Pain Advice and Exercise Leaflet

The Achilles Tendon

The Achilles tendon is the large tendon at the back of the ankle. It connects the large calf muscles to the heel bone. Just like a joint the Achilles tendon is also subject to becoming irritated and this can result in Achilles Tendinopathy.

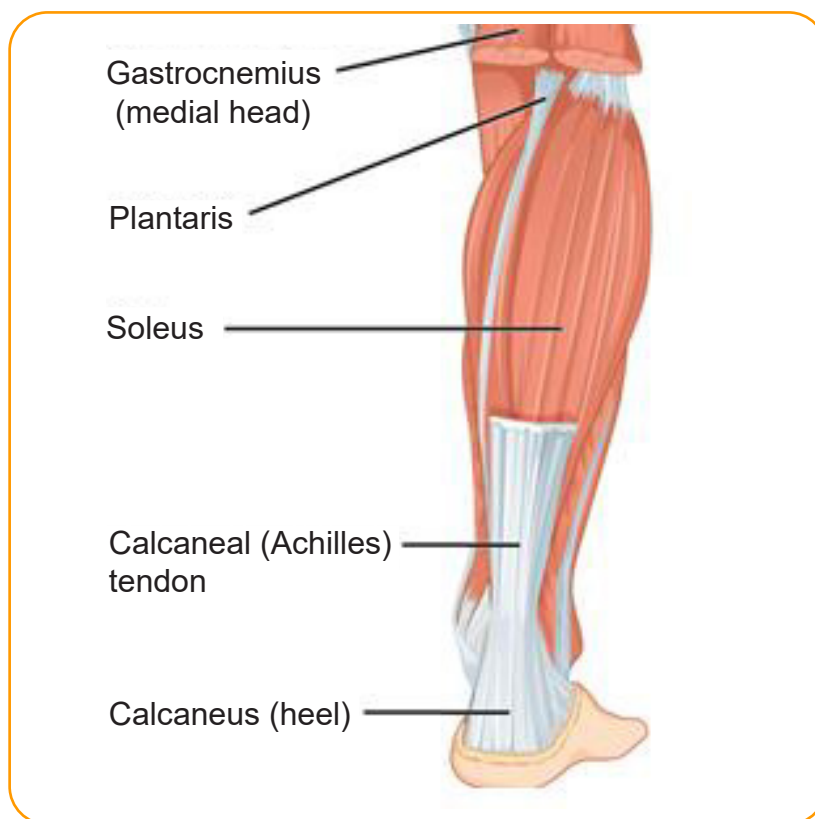


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What are the symptoms of Achilles Tendinopathy?

People usually complain of pain and stiffness behind the ankle especially in the morning or after activity. The symptoms normally start gradually and may start for no known reason. Pain typically occurs whilst running or walking, especially uphill or on stairs and subsides with rest. The tendon may feel hot and swollen and may feel lumpy to touch.

What causes Achilles Tendinopathy?

Anything that places increased load or stress on the Achilles tendon will cause it to become symptomatic.

There are a number of causes, which include the following:

- Poor ankle/foot mechanics; flat footedness.
- Change in footwear.
- Poor conditioning; weakness and/or tightness of the leg muscles.
- Overuse injury, such as repetitive uphill running.
- Sudden increase in training.

What can you do to help relieve symptoms?

Rest the tendon

Reduce the amount of running/walking you do.

Shoe wear

A small heel will reduce the stretch on the tendon or a heel lift shoe insert can be worn (in both shoes). Make sure the back of your shoe does not rub on the painful area.

Apply ice to the area for 10-15 minutes to help reduce any inflammation and soreness. A bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel is ideal.

CAUTION - direct contact of ice on the skin can cause burns.

It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the item immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.

Medications can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice.

Gentle Ankle Movement

When we are not moving our ankle the tendon can stiffen. Before getting out of bed in the morning or if sat for longer than 20-30 minutes it is important to move your ankle up and down to gradually loosen and warm-up your tendon.

Exercises

It is important to do specific exercises to gradually load and strengthen the tendon. These exercises need to be performed **every other day** for 12 weeks.

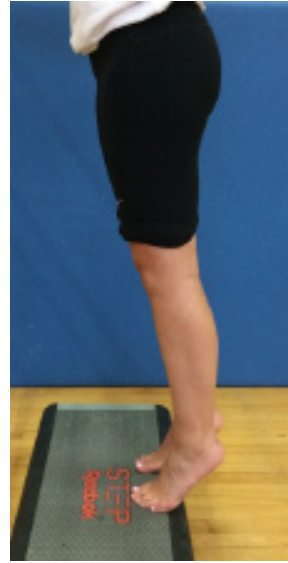
Level 1

1. Stand with heels over the edge of a step (a)
2. Hold onto the rail for balance
3. Rise up onto the toes in 5 seconds
4. Hold for 3 seconds
5. Slowly lower in 5 seconds

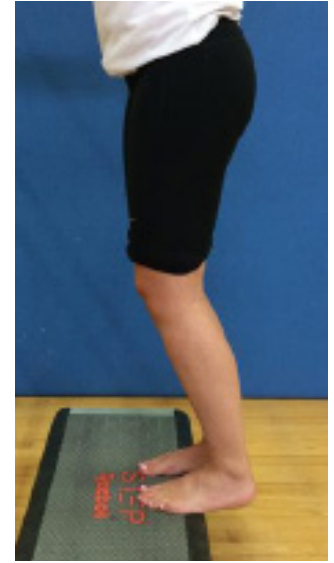
Complete 15 repetitions x 3 sets with knee straight (small rest between sets)

6. Then repeat 15 x 3 with knee slightly bent (b)

a.



b.



Take care not to lose your balance

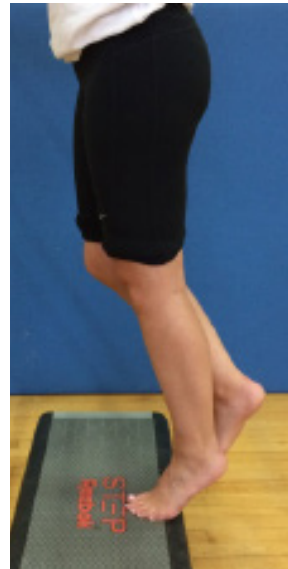
Once you can complete these exercises pain free move onto Level 2.

Level 2

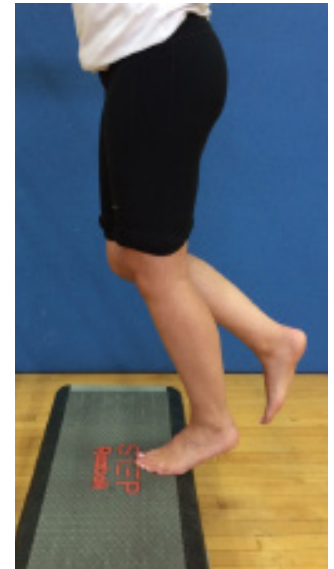
To progress the exercises we need to increase the load.

To do this you complete the above exercises on one leg at a time.

a.



b.



Level 3

When the exercises become pain free, perform the exercises with weights. You can add some weight to a rucksack to wear whilst doing the exercises. It is important to continue to build up the weight gradually.

Important Information when completing your exercises

If your pain is located right at the bottom of your Achilles where it attaches to your heel. Avoid dropping your heel too low off the step.

Some discomfort with the exercises is ok but if your pain is aggravated later that day or the following morning post completing your exercises this is a sign that you need to reduce the load or repetitions.

Only progress onto the next level of exercises when you can complete full sets with no pain. It may take several weeks to progress to the next level.

Continue to complete the exercises for 12 weeks even if your pain has resolved.

As symptoms reduce gradually return to activity.

Stop the exercises if they increase your pain. If you are struggling with these exercises, please seek guidance from a qualified physiotherapist.

And Lastly

As well as these exercises a foam roller can be used to help relax the calf muscles that add tension to the Achilles Tendon.

a.



Rest calf over foam roller. Bend one leg up and push up through your arms and leg then roll forwards and backwards. You should feel deep pressure along your calf. It is normal for this to feel very uncomfortable. (a)

Roll your calf up and down for a few minutes every day.

b.



To increase the pressure cross your pain-free leg over your painful leg, push up through your arms and roll backwards and forwards.(b)

Summary

Achilles Tendinopathy pain can take some months to settle down. It is important to complete these exercises to strengthen the tendon.

If your symptoms do not settle within 3 months of following the above steps, you may benefit from a review with a physiotherapist.

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Physiotherapy Department
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Telephone: 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office: 01484 905380

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If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

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