

Achilles Tendinitis

Definition: The Achilles tendon is a thick band that attaches your calf muscle to your heel bone. Achilles tendinitis is usually described as an inflammation (swelling) of the Achilles tendon, although it is actually more correctly described as tiny tears in the tendon caused by overuse.

Common Terms: Achilles overuse syndrome, inflammation of the Achilles, tendinitis of the heel

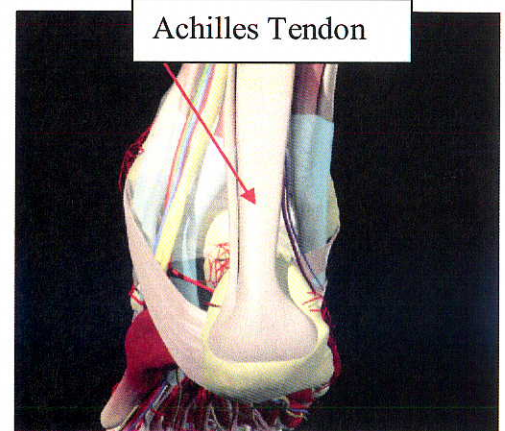
Typical Mechanism of Injury: Achilles tendinitis usually develops from overuse. This can occur with excessive jumping and landing type activities. It can also occur as a result of trauma such as from a direct blow to the tendon. Shoes that do not fit properly may also cause irritation and inflammation of the tendon due to the repetitive rubbing forces on the tendon.

Common Signs and Symptoms: Pain is usually noticed with walking and running as well as pushing directly on the tendon. The tendon may also show signs of swelling and may look thicker when compared to the other leg. Often the tendon will feel a bit better once you are warmed up.

Common Treatment: The initial treatment for Achilles tendinitis is the application of ice, compression (like an ace wrap) and elevation. A change in your activities to rest the area is also important. Occasionally anti-inflammatory drugs (Motrin, Ibuprofen, etc) are also used. With rest the tendon has time to repair the tiny tears that are causing this condition. The ice is helpful to relieve the pain and reduce the swelling. Using an ace wrap is another good way to help reduce the swelling. A heel lift may also be used to put less stress on the tendon. Rehabilitation is beneficial to strengthen the muscles above and below the Achilles while indirectly strengthening the Achilles itself. Stretching of the Achilles tendon is a major part of rehabilitation.

Prevention: Maintaining good strength and flexibility is important to prevent any overuse condition. Paying attention to how much you increase your activity level and being careful not to add too many new activities all at once are important aspects of avoiding overuse injuries. If an overused Achilles tendon is tight and weak it is extremely susceptible to tendinitis. Proper footwear and running surfaces should also be monitored.

Expectations: Being consistent in following the treatment protocol mentioned above will reduce the pain and inflammation of the tendon as well as improve the strength and flexibility of the calf muscles. In very rare instances the injury does not get better, even with treatment, and surgery may be necessary.



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