

# Achilles Tendinopathy

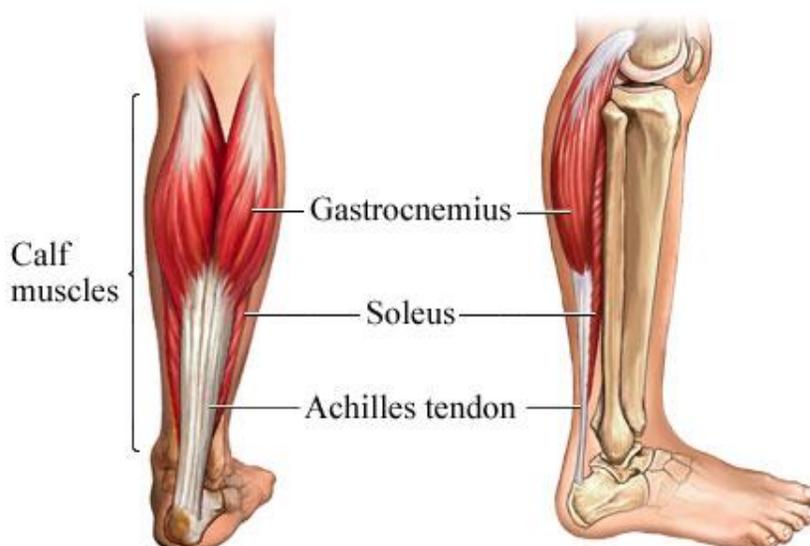
Staff Information Leaflet

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**This leaflet is designed to give you an understanding of Achilles tendinopathy, the treatment that may be beneficial and some advice on what you can do to help yourself. If your symptoms persist you should seek advice from your GP or occupational health service.**

## Introduction

The calf muscles are the group of muscles at the back of the lower leg. They consist of the Soleus and the Gastrocnemius muscles. Both muscles insert into the heel via the Achilles tendon. A tendon is the term for fibres that connect muscle to bone. The Achilles tendon's function is to plantar flex the foot (point the toes) when the calf muscles contract.



## Causes

Although the Achilles is the strongest tendon in the body, it can sometimes be overloaded or under loaded, leading to pain. Achilles problems most commonly occur due to repetitive or prolonged activities that strain the tendon. This typically occurs following excessive periods of walking, running or jumping, or returning to a sport that you haven't done for a while.

General tightness in the calf muscles can put extra load on the Achilles tendon and can cause symptoms very similar to Achilles tendinopathy. This is particularly common in the summer months when we adopt less structured, flatter shoes with no heel e.g. flip flops / sandals.

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## Symptoms

The common symptoms of Achilles tendinopathy include:

- Pain
- Stiffness
- Thickening of the tendon
- Pain when squeezing the tendon

In less severe cases, pain may only occur after exercise or prolonged activity. These symptoms are typically experienced at night or first thing in the morning. As the condition progresses, patients may experience symptoms during activity. Pain is often felt when walking or running, especially uphill or on uneven surfaces. In severe cases, patients may walk with a limp or be unable to weight bear on the affected leg.

## Factors that can predispose you to Achilles tendinopathy

- Joint stiffness (particularly the ankle)
- Muscle tightness (particularly the calf muscles)
- Inappropriate or excessive training
- Poor biomechanics
- Poor foot posture (i.e. flat feet or high arches)
- Inappropriate footwear
- Inadequate warm up
- Muscle weakness
- Poor proprioception or core stability
- Being overweight

## What can I do to help myself?

Achilles tendon problems can improve significantly within 3–6 months if the correct advice and exercises are followed.

### Pain relief

Simple analgesia such as paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory such as Ibuprofen can be very effective for the treatment of Achilles pain in the early stages of injury. You can obtain advice regarding medication from your local pharmacist or G.P, but remember to read the packet and do not take over the recommended dosage.

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## Activity

Complete rest can be a bad thing. Prolonged rest will cause the muscles and tendons to weaken, prolonging the symptoms.

Relative rest is encouraged, i.e. you should temporarily reduce or even stop the activity that has caused your problem. It is often beneficial to avoid high impact activities, such as running or jumping when the symptoms are present.

If your Achilles is particularly sore when walking around and doing everyday things, then try wearing a shoe with a slight heel or putting a small heel raise in your shoe. This takes some of the stretching load out of the tendon, helping to relieve the pain.

Recreational exercise can be restarted as your pain allows.

## Foot wear

It is important to wear supportive shoes with a slight heel. Trainers are useful initially as they will also act as a shock absorber. You can buy heel raises from your local pharmacist to help off load the tendon.

## Exercises

These exercises have been designed by a physiotherapist to treat Achilles Tendinopathy. If performed correctly and regularly they will aid your recovery and help prevent reoccurrences.

Do not continue the exercises if they significantly increase your pain or swelling. If this were to occur, please see your GP / Physiotherapist for further advice.



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In sitting or lying, bend and straighten your ankle so your toes point towards and then away from you.

Repeat 10 times, 2-3 times a day or as able

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In sitting or lying turn your foot inwards and outwards.

Repeat 10 times, 2-3 times a day or as able



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In sitting or lying on the floor or sofa with your knee straight and your foot flat against a wall or the sofa arm.

Push the ball of your foot against the wall or the sofa arm.

Hold the contraction for up to 10 seconds (or as able) and repeat up to 10 times, 2-3 times a day or as able

## What about work?

Maintaining all normal activities including work improves your chance of recovery by keeping you moving. This helps you keep your 'work fitness' and prevents your lower leg muscles getting weaker, which can prolong your Achilles pain.

***Remember... You do not have to be pain free to return to or remain at work.***

It may be necessary to do temporary lighter or modified duties. This should be discussed with your line manager initially. If further clarification is needed your Occupational Health advisor can identify more specific role modifications.

## What should I do if I am still experiencing problems?

If you are unable to agree on restricted roles with you manager or you are still having problems despite following this advice then your Occupational Health team can help. The Occupational Health team can advise you on how to bridge the gap to help you return to normal activities. You can also gain access to the Occupational Health physiotherapist by:

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## Self-referral

The Occupational Health can assist in the management of musculoskeletal problems that affect your ability to work. Staff are able to self-refer to physiotherapy via the Occupational Health intranet web page or from the trust Occupational health internet page.

<http://nuth-intranet/cms/SupportServices/OccupationalHealth/Physiotherapy.aspx>

[http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/about-us/staff-information\\_newcastleohs\\_ohs-referrals.aspx](http://www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/about-us/staff-information_newcastleohs_ohs-referrals.aspx)

## Management referral

If you feel your symptoms are having a significant effect on your ability to carry out your role, discuss this with your manager and request a referral to the Occupational Health Service.

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For more information on Achilles tendinopathy or how to stay active, why not try:



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



<https://www.nhsinform.scot/>



[www.activenewcastle.co.uk/](http://www.activenewcastle.co.uk/)

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