

Achilles tendinopathy

Your clinician has diagnosed you with Achilles tendinopathy. This leaflet provides information on what Achilles tendinopathy is and how you can manage it. If you have any questions, please speak to a physiotherapist caring for you.

What is Achilles tendinopathy?

The Achilles tendon connects the calf (the back of the lower part of your leg) muscles to the heel bone, and helps you to push up on your tiptoes. Achilles tendinopathy is an injury to this tendon, most often due to an overload. The tendon is unable to cope with the strain being applied to it.

It is not necessary to carry out x-rays or scans to diagnose Achilles tendinopathy, it is usually confirmed by taking a medical history of the patient and completing a physical examination.

What are the symptoms of Achilles tendinopathy?

The typical symptoms include pain, stiffness and swelling of the back of the heel.

Pain is often present first thing in the morning or when you begin to walk after resting for a period of time. The pain can be variable and it can improve as you keep moving. You may notice it can be painful after lots of weight-bearing activities such as walking or running.

In some cases, the tendon may become red, warm and tender to touch and swollen or thickened in appearance.

What causes Achilles tendinopathy?

The causes of Achilles tendinopathy are not fully understood, but there are many factors that can contribute to it, including:

- being overweight
- tight or weak calf muscles
- stiff ankle joints
- sudden large increases in activity levels, for example, running, walking, playing sports
- training errors including a lack of variety in training, or too much hill running
- on-going physical or mental health problems can contribute to the symptoms.

How is Achilles tendinopathy managed?

To reduce pain in the short term you can try the following:

- Relative rest: reduce activities on your feet such as prolonged walking or running but you can maintain your fitness by doing other forms of exercise, such as cycling or swimming.
- Pain relief: painkillers may be used to provide short term pain relief.
- Ice: applying ice, wrapped in a towel, can help with pain and swelling in the early stages.
- Footwear: Choosing supportive footwear, rather than flat shoes can help in relieving pain.

As Achilles tendinopathy is related to the ability of the tendon to cope with load, exercises specific to strengthening this tendon will help healing and return to activity. Please see below for appropriate exercises to complete in the early and later stages of rehabilitation. Your physiotherapist may identify other specific exercises for you to complete. You will need to follow the instructions and monitor your performance of these carefully. Exercises specific to the tendon are needed to help recovery, but overloading the tendon may worsen the pain.

Exercises for the early stages



Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support, as shown in the picture. Your heels should be over the edge of the step. Hold this position for 20-30 seconds. Repeat three times.



Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support, on one foot, as shown in the picture. Your heels should be over the edge of the step. Hold this position for 20-30 seconds. Repeat three times.

Exercises for the later stages



Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support, on two feet. Your heels should be over the edge of the step. Lift up on to your toes, as shown in the picture, and slowly lower back to the starting position. **Do not drop your heels lower than the step.** Complete three sets of 10-12 repetitions.



Stand on the edge of a step, on one foot, holding a handrail for support. Your heel should be over the edge of the step. Lift up on to your toes and slowly lower back to the starting position. **Do not drop your heels lower than the step.** Complete three sets of 10-12 repetitions.

How long does it take to get better?

Everybody will improve differently. For most people it will six to nine months of focused rehabilitation to make a return to full activities without pain. It is normal to have some periods of increased pain or flare ups during your recovery. You can follow the tips above aimed at reducing the pain in the short-term during this time.

If your symptoms don't improve within six to nine months, even when you have been completing an appropriate exercise programme, other treatment options, such as shockwave therapy, may be considered and can be discussed with a medical professional if appropriate.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Physiotherapy department,
t: 020 7188 5094, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health. **w:** www.nhs.uk

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Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership



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