Achilles tendinopathy

You have been diagnosed with Achilles tendinopathy. This information explains 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. It helps you to push up on your tiptoes.

Achilles tendinopathy is an injury to this tendon. It is most often due to an overload. The tendon cannot cope with the strain being put on it.

You will not need an X-ray or other scan to diagnose Achilles tendinopathy. It is usually confirmed by taking your medical history and doing a physical examination.

Symptoms of Achilles tendinopathy
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 feel better as you keep moving. You might notice it can be painful after lots of weight-bearing activities, such as walking or running.

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

Causes of Achilles tendinopathy
The causes of Achilles tendinopathy are not fully understood. There are many factors that can contribute to it, such as:

- being overweight
- having tight or weak calf muscles
- having stiff ankle joints
- a sudden increase in activity levels, for example, running, walking or 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

Managing pain
To help pain in the short-term, you can try the following:

- **Relative rest.** Reduce activities on your feet, such as prolonged walking or running. Keep up your fitness by doing other forms of exercise, such as cycling or swimming.
- **Pain relief.** You can use painkillers for short-term pain relief.
- **Ice.** Wrap ice in a towel and put it on the area. This can help with pain and swelling in the early stages. Do not put ice directly onto the skin.
- **Footwear.** Choose supportive footwear, rather than flat shoes.
Exercises for Achilles tendinopathy
Exercises to strengthen the Achilles tendon will help healing and return to activity. Please see below for exercises to complete in the early and later stages of rehabilitation. Your physiotherapist might show you other exercises to do.

You will need to follow the instructions and monitor how you do these exercises carefully. These exercises are needed to help recovery, but overloading the tendon might make your pain worse. If you have any questions or concerns, speak to your physiotherapist.

Exercises for the early stages

Exercise 1
1 Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support.
2 Your heels should be over the edge of the step.
3 Hold this position for 20 to 30 seconds.
4 Repeat this exercise 3 times.

Exercise 2
Follow the instructions for exercise 1, but do the exercise standing on 1 foot.

Exercises for the later stages

Exercise 3
1 Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support.
2 Your heels should be over the edge of the step.
3 Lift up on to your toes.
4 Slowly lower back to the starting position. **Do not drop your heels lower than the step.**
5 Do this 10 to 12 times.
6 Rest and then repeat this exercise 3 times.

Exercise 4
Follow the instructions for exercise 3, but do the exercise standing on 1 foot.
How long does it take to get better?
Everybody will improve differently. For most people it will take 6 to 9 months of 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. If this happens, you can follow the tips above to reduce pain in the short-term.

If your symptoms do not improve in 6 to 9 months, even when you have been completing an appropriate exercise programme, other treatment options can be considered. This includes shockwave therapy, which you can talk to your physiotherapist about.

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns, contact the physiotherapy department, phone 020 7188 5094 Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm.

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, visit web 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 contact our helpline, phone 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.
phone 020 7188 8801 (PALS) email pals@gstt.nhs.uk
phone 020 7188 3514 (complaints) email 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, phone 020 7188 8815 email 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, phone 111

NHS website
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health, web www.nhs.uk