

Achilles Tendinopathy Self-Management Guide

Patient Information

Overview

The Achilles tendon connects the calf muscles to the heel bone, and helps you to push up on your tiptoes. Achilles tendinopathy is an injury to the tendon, most often due to an overload injury and poor repair. Once this has happened the tendon usually becomes unable to cope with day to day activities.



Symptoms

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 becomes painful after lots of weight-bearing activities such as walking or running. In some cases, the tendon may become, warm and tender to touch with a swollen or thickened appearance.

Contributing factors for Achilles Tendinopathy;

- Overuse – Work & Sport.
- Large changes in exercise – too much too soon.
- Frequent activities on hard or sloped surfaces.
- Tight or weak calf muscles.
- Inappropriate footwear.
- Being overweight.
- Certain inflammatory & health conditions.

Self-management for Achilles Tendinopathy;

Try making changes to your current lifestyle using the points below and follow the links for more information. Achilles tendinopathy usually clears within 6-12 months of starting treatment.

- Weight loss. (*Leaflet available*) or follow; <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/>
- Stretching & strengthening exercises. *Continue below*
- Use supportive footwear. (*Leaflet available*)
- Strapping and taping. (*Leaflet available*)
- Supportive Insoles. (*Leaflet available*) - Always build up use of insoles gradually and stop use if you have any new pain.



- Modification to lifestyle at home & work – Rest when you can & avoid prolonged activity such as standing, walking and high impact sports.
- Ice may be useful for pain control and to help reduce swelling. (*Leaflet available*)

Exercises for the early stages of Treatment

When you have Achilles tendinopathy the tendon struggles to cope with daily loads, so exercises specific to strengthening the tendon will help healing and return you to activity. Please see below for the appropriate exercises to complete in the early and later stages of your rehabilitation. You will need to follow the instructions and monitor your performance of these carefully.

Exercises designed to strengthen your tendon are needed to help recovery, but they may worsen the pain in the short term - this is normal.

Towel stretch

- Whilst in a seated position with your legs out straight, loop a towel around the ball of your foot.
- Keeping your knee straight, pull the ends of the towel towards you.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times each side. 3 times per day.



Lunge stretch

- Stand at arm's length from a wall or kitchen counter.
- Place one foot behind the other. Slowly bend your front knee, keeping your back leg straight and heel on the floor. Engage your core muscles.
- Hold for 30 seconds & relax Switch legs and repeat.
- Repeat this exercise 3 times each side 3 times per day.



Isometric Holds

- Stand on the edge of a step, holding a handrail for support.
- Your heels should be over the edge of the step.
- Hold for 5-10 secs & relax. Repeat 3 times and 3 times per day.
- You can then progress to single leg isometric holds.



Exercises for the later stages

Eccentric Loading

- 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 onto your toes (as in the picture 1).
- Taking your weight onto the affected leg, (picture 2) slowly lower back to your starting point. (If symptoms are in both legs, then alternate between legs when lowering).
- Repeat 15 times on each affected leg. Repeat 3 times per day.
- Build up to 20 times on each affected leg up to 5 times per day.



Picture 1



Picture 2

If your symptoms have not started to settle in 12 weeks you can contact us on 01633 615225 or risca.podiatry@wales.nhs.uk for further advice.

**"This document is available in Welsh /
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg".**