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# Achilles Tendinopathy

## Physiotherapy Department



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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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### *Soleus stretch*

- Stand and place both hands on a wall, with your feet about half a meter from the wall.
- Place one leg behind the other and slowly bend the knees while keeping the heels on the floor until you feel a stretch in the calf of the back leg.
- Maintain the stretch for 30 seconds and then relax.
- Repeat 2-3 times.
- You can do this 2-3 times per day.

## **What is Achilles tendinopathy?**

Achilles tendinopathy is a soft tissue disorder which causes pain in the Achilles tendon. It usually occurs when a tendon is unable to adapt to the strain being placed upon it. This leads to repeated small amounts of damage within the tendon fibers. The term 'chronic Achilles tendinopathy' is usually used to describe symptoms persisting for more than 6 weeks.

## **The causes of Achilles tendinopathy**

Many things affect the load being put through the tendon. It is more common from the age of 30 and in men. General risks:

- A higher than average body weight.
- Diabetes.
- Tight calf muscles.
- Poor hip, knee or ankle strength and / or stability.
- Stiff joints in the foot.

Certain aspects of exercise and training can also increase your risk of developing Achilles tendinopathy. For example:

- Running too far.
- Exercising at too high an intensity.
- Increasing distances or times too quickly / not progressing gradually.
- Lack of variation in training.
- Old or poor quality footwear.
- Too much hill running.

## Signs and Symptoms

Typical symptoms and signs of Achilles tendinopathy include:

- Pain and stiffness around the tendon first thing in the morning or after a period of immobility which eases with movement.
- The tendon may be painful to touch.
- The pain can settle during exercise but then increase after rest. However, some people experience severe pain which can stop them from exercising.

## How long will it take it get better?

It depends on how long you have had the problem for and how severe it is but it can take a few months to a year to improve.

## How can I / physiotherapy help me to get better?

- Use of cold packs or ice can help reduce pain.
- Simple analgesia (such as paracetamol) or anti-inflammatories (such as ibuprofen or diclofenac).
- An initial period of relative rest (stopping high impact activities, such as running) until pain subsides. Exercise can be restarted gradually when pain allows. To maintain fitness during the period of relative rest you can continue to choose forms of exercise for your non painful limbs to

## Phase Four - Late stage / Return to Sport

Progress to this stage only if you can do the Level 3 exercises with  $\leq 3/10$  pain-rating during the exercises.

Repeat the level 3 exercises but hold a weight in the opposite hand or put a weight in a back pack. Start with a small weight such as 2-3 kg but as the exercise becomes easier you can gradually increase the weight.

## Stretches

Stretches can be useful if your calf muscles feel tight. However, if they increase your Achilles symptoms then you should not continue with them.



### *Gastrocnemius stretch*

- Stand and place both hands on a wall, with your feet about half a meter from the wall.
- Place one leg behind the other and lean your body forward without bending the back knee until you feel a stretch in your back calf.
- Maintain the stretch for 30 seconds and then relax.
- Repeat 2-3 times.
- You can do this 2-3 times per day.

## Phase Three

Progress to this stage only if you can do the Level 2 exercises with  $\leq 3/10$  pain-rating during the exercise.



### *Single leg heel raise*

- Stand on one foot on the floor next to a chair or table for balance.
- Slowly raise the heel to go onto your toes without bending your knee.
- Slowly lower to the starting position.
- Perform repetitions until fatigue
- Perform 2-3 sets every other day.



### *Bent knee single leg heel raise*

- Repeat the above heel raise exercise but with your knees slightly bent.
- Perform repetitions until fatigue
- Perform 2-3 sets every other day

maintain general health. This will allow symptoms to settle until you can gradually re start exercising your painful limb (lower impact exercise such as cycling or swimming could be used)

- Weight loss if this is above average for your height/gender can reduce pressure on your tendons and also help relieve pain and recover the tendon pain.
- Physiotherapy can offer a biomechanical assessment if a lower limb muscle weakness or tightness is suspected of contributing to the injury.
- Physiotherapy treatment will involve exercises such as strengthening and sometimes stretching.
- Identification and appropriate management of underlying causes and contributory factors, such as footwear, can also be considered by physiotherapists.

## Exercises

### Graded Strengthening Programme

Several studies have shown it is safe to perform exercises with pain up to 5/10 on a self-rating scale during the exercise. It is very important to gradually progress through the different levels of exercise, to sufficiently allow the Achilles tendon to increase its load tolerance.

#### Phase One



*Isometric heel raise*

- Stand with feet hip width apart.
- You can hold onto the wall or the back or a chair for balance
- Push up onto your toes on both feet.
- Hold for 45-60 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times.
- You can do this 2-3 times per day.

#### Phase Two

Progress to this stage only if you can do the Level 1 exercise with  $\leq 3/10$  pain-rating during the exercise.



*Heel raise*

- Stand with feet hip width apart.
- You can hold onto the wall or the back or a chair for balance
- Push slowly up onto your toes on both feet then slowly lower yourself.
- Perform repetitions until fatigue
- Perform 2-3 sets every other day.



*Bent knee heel raise*

- Repeat the above heel raise exercise but with your knees slightly bent.
- Perform repetitions until fatigue
- Perform 2-3 sets every other day.