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# Tibialis Posterior Tendinopathy

## Physiotherapy Department



## The Tibialis Posterior

The tibialis posterior is one of the most important muscles within the lower leg. It originates from the upper section of the lower leg (calf), travels down the inside of the lower leg, behind the inside ankle bone and its tendon attaches underneath the inside of the foot. Its primary role is to support the medial arch of the foot during standing and walking. As the tendon becomes older, weakened or if it is injured it can cause the arch of the foot to drop resulting in a 'flat foot' and often pain.

### What causes tibialis posterior tendinopathy?

There are 2 main reasons why this can develop:

- 1) **Overuse** - repetitive overload over time that causes the tendon to lengthen and weaken so it stops supporting the arch of the foot.
- 2) **Trauma** - sudden severe strain or tear following impact or twisting injury to the ankle/foot. Often ligaments of the foot and ankle can be damaged which can also lead to tibialis posterior tendinopathy and 'flat foot' conditions.

There are a number of other contributing factors that can increase the risk of developing this condition:

- Female (>40 years old)
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Hypermobility
- Childhood flat feet
- High impact exercise
- Tight calves

- If you are over the age of 65, or at risk of falls, you should incorporate physical activity to improve balance and co-ordination at least 2 days per week.
- If you are keen to join a gym or leisure centre at a discounted rate, you can discuss the 'Exercise Referral Scheme' with your GP or other healthcare professional

### Prognosis

Tendon pains can take a long time to improve. Following the advice from this leaflet, you should start to see improvements within 6 to 12 weeks, although it can take 6 to 12 months of rehabilitation to return to all normal activities. If you are not seeing any improvements within 3 months, you should discuss this with your physiotherapist.

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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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## Limit your alcohol intake

- Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/> for support.
- You can find a local alcohol addiction support service at: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-alcohol-addiction-support-services/>

## Look after your psychological well-being

- Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/> or <https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/mental-wellbeing> for support.
- If you are feeling anxious or low in mood and feel you would benefit from counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy, you can self-refer to Mind Matters at <https://www.mindmattersnhs.co.uk/>.
- If you are feeling lonely, anxious, are recently bereaved, or are looking for employment, ask your GP or healthcare professional about local social prescribing services.
- If you live in Surrey Heath, Spelthorne, or East Surrey, you can self-refer yourself to social prescribing services on <https://www.connecttosupportsurrey.org.uk/>

## Meet physical activity guidelines

- Complete at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week, or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity per week, alongside 2 days per week of strengthening activities. Moderate intensity activity can include brisk walking or riding a bike, whilst vigorous activity can include running or skipping.

## What can I do to help myself?

### 1. Offload the tendon

It is important to get your pain under control by offloading your aggravated tendon before starting the process of graded loading which will help it recover in the long term. There are a number of ways in which you can do this, but it is important to get the balance right between doing too much and too little.

- **Relative rest** - this does not mean do nothing! Rest in between normal activities by putting your foot up on a stool. Try to rest at regular intervals to help prevent a build-up of pain which will slow your progress.
- **Medial arch insoles** - insoles will help to support the arch of the foot and reduce load through your tendon. This will allow the tendon to rest in order to recover and in turn reduce your pain.
- **Supportive footwear** - Trainers, lace up shoes or walking shoes are recommended as they support your whole foot during daily activities (indoors and outdoors). This helps to offload your aggravated tendon and reduce pain. Slippers, pumps, flip flops and bare feet should be avoided as they cannot give you the support you require.
- **Taping** - taping can temporarily offload the tendon. Care should be taken regarding allergies to tape.
- **Weight loss** - if you are overweight, losing weight is an effective method of reducing load on your tendon and reducing the amount of global inflammation in your body.

## 2. Reduce inflammation

Reducing the inflammation in your tendon will help reduce your pain and swelling if done correctly. This is important so that you are able to tolerate daily activities and comply with physiotherapy exercises which will help your tendon recover.

- **Ice** - Ice (ie. a bag of peas) wrapped in a tea towel applied to your ankle/foot for up to 10 minutes at a time up to 8 times a day.
- **Anti-inflammatory medication** - Taking a course of anti-inflammatories (ie. ibuprofen) is more effective at controlling your pain than only taking medication when your pain becomes severe. Please consult your GP/Pharmacist before taking anti-inflammatories and always follow the instructions on the packet.

## 3. Pace and modify activities

Pacing activities involves breaking larger tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks and/or doing them more slowly. Activity modification involves adapting the way you do certain tasks to make them easier and less strenuous for your tendon.

Pacing and modifying activities help prevent increased pain and aggravation of your tendon which will set you back.

## Sleep

- Poor sleep has been shown to increase the risk of injury and affect healing.
- Maintain regular sleep hours (try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day).
- Avoid napping where possible.
- Avoid digital screens, alcohol, and caffeine before bed.
- Have a dark, quiet, and cool sleeping environment.
- Avoid sleeping with pets on the bed.
- If you are lying awake unable to sleep, get up and do something relaxing before returning to bed.
- You can access guided relaxation videos to help you relax before bed on the ASPH Physiotherapy YouTube 'Relaxation' playlist.

## Eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight

- Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/> for support with food choices.
- Visit <https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/nutrition-and-physical-activity> for nutrition and weight management advice.
- If you feel you could benefit from losing weight, you can download the free NHS 12-week Weight Loss Plan on <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>

## Stop smoking

- Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/> for support.
- You can self-refer to One You Surrey for individualized smoking cessation support at: <https://oneyousurrey.org.uk/stop-smoking/>.



## Calf stretching



Place your hands on the wall with one leg in front of the other.

1. Keep your back leg straight & bend your front leg, whilst keeping your heels down, until you feel a stretch. Hold for 30 seconds then release.
2. Now bend your back leg whilst maintaining your heels on the floor, this will stretch the deeper part of your calf (soleus). Hold for 30 seconds then release.
3. Repeat 3 times each side

All exercise images provided with consent of <https://physiotec.ca/>

## 6. Healthy living

Your rehabilitation program will be an important part of helping you to manage and improve your pain. In addition to this, it is important to think about your other lifestyle choices. Good lifestyle choices can help you to get the most out of your rehabilitation plan, aid your recovery, and can have a very positive impact on your general overall health.

## 4. Should my exercises be pain-free?

Generally, it is acceptable to complete exercises even if they are uncomfortable. There is some evidence to show that, in the short term, exercising into pain can be more beneficial than pain-free exercise.

It is important to remember that hurt does not equal harm; exercises that are tolerably painful are not causing damage to your ankle / foot, but rather stressing sensitive structures. However, it is still essential to respect pain to avoid significant flare-ups – the traffic light system is a helpful guide:

**Green light:** 0-3/10 pain during the activity, no change in symptoms in following 24h - trial a small progression next session.

**Orange light:** 4-6/10 pain during the activity, slight increase in symptoms in the hour following the activity and back to normal within 24h - consider reducing or maintaining the intensity until it is at a green light level.

**Red light:** Over 6/10 pain during the activity with increase in symptoms that takes over 24h to settle - reduce the intensity next session until it is back to orange or green.



## 5. Exercises

These exercises are designed to load your tendon slowly and progressively over time to help it recover. Isometric exercises (level 1) have the potential to reduce pain levels, so always start here before moving on to the more advanced exercises.

### Level 1 - Isometric plantarflexion and inversion



Place a ball against the wall and press your foot down into it for 10 seconds whilst keeping your knee straight. Release and repeat 5 times.



Place a ball between your feet in sitting. Press your feet into the ball whilst keeping your knees parallel and hold for 10 seconds. Release and repeat 5 times.

You can increase the time you hold the contraction for to 45-60 secs as tolerated.

### Level 2 - Resisted movement through range



Place an exercise band around your forefoot with your legs outstretched. Push your foot down and in, into the band. Hold for 1-2 seconds then release slowly to return to the starting position. Repeat 8-12 times for 2-3 sets.



In a seated position press your toes into the floor and lift your heels up. Hold for 1-2 seconds then slowly lower your heel back to the floor. Repeat 8-12 times for 2-3 sets.

These exercises should be repeated every other day or 3 x a week.

### Level 3 - Heel raises



In standing, hold/lean onto a stable surface and slowly lift your heels off the floor as much as you are able. Hold for 2 seconds and slowly return to a standing position. Repeat 8-12 times for 2-3 sets.

Progression: Add a weighted rucksack or repeat on one leg. This exercise should be repeated every other day or 3 x a week.