

Achilles Tendinopathy

What is Achilles tendinopathy?

The Achilles tendon is a long strip of tissue that connects the calf muscle at the back of your leg to the heel bone. It is the longest and strongest tendon in the body. Tendons attach bones to muscles and help us to provide joints with movement.

Achilles Tendinopathy is a common musculoskeletal condition in all ages and is caused by changes in the tendon. The exact cause remains unclear.

Who gets it?

- People who walk, run or are very active with change in training and medical conditions
- If you are on certain medication, this can also increase the likelihood of the condition developing

What are the symptoms?

- Pain and stiffness in the tendon itself (often first thing in the morning)
- Some mild thickening or swelling of the tendon
- Difficulty with walking or running

How is it diagnosed?

Achilles Tendinopathy is diagnosed by a Physiotherapist or Doctor. They will take a history from you about your symptoms and carry out necessary examination. Further investigations like scans are not usually needed to diagnose the condition, though they are sometimes used later to guide some treatments.

Achilles Tendinopathy (continued)

What can I do to help?

Most episodes of Achilles Tendinopathy are treated successfully with “loading programmes” over 12 weeks. It is very important that you follow the advice of your Physiotherapist and keep them informed of your progress and how the tendon is feeling. The programme can be quite intense for the tendon but it is thought that tendons need to be challenged with plenty of load to stimulate recovery. Tendons do not like rest!

- Rest - only if very new Achilles pain - less than a week of symptoms
- Weight loss measures if you are overweight
- Painkillers or anti-inflammatories - paracetamol or “non-steroidal anti-inflammatory” (e.g. Ibuprofen)
- Physiotherapy for the loading programme guidance and progressing

Tailored exercises to your diagnosis are required. Your Physiotherapist or Rehabilitation Therapist will discuss and prescribe these to you.

What other treatments might help?

The majority of people will improve with loading programme. However, in cases where Achilles Tendinopathy does not resolve with the above treatments, there are other options. These options can be considered on a case by case basis but there is less evidence of the treatment effectiveness. You may wish to discuss these options with your clinician.

Surgery may be an option. This typically involves making a small incision around the tendon and removing tissue that is problematic. Patients often make a full recovery and return to their previous activity levels.