



# Achilles Tendinitis

Achilles tendinitis is an overuse injury of the Achilles tendon, the band of tissue that connects the calf muscles at the back of the lower leg to your heel bone. It most commonly occurs in runners who have suddenly increased the intensity or duration of their runs. It's also common in middle-aged people who play sports, such as tennis or basketball, only on the weekends.

Most cases of Achilles tendinitis can be treated with simple, at-home care under your doctor's supervision. Self-care strategies are usually necessary to prevent recurring episodes. More serious cases of Achilles tendinitis can lead to tendon tears (ruptures) that may require surgical repair.

**Symptoms:** The pain associated with Achilles tendinitis typically begins as a mild ache in the back of the leg or above the heel after running or other sports activity. Episodes of more severe pain may occur after prolonged running, stair climbing, or sprinting. You might also experience tenderness or stiffness, especially in the morning, which usually improves with mild activity. If you experience persistent pain around the Achilles tendon, call your doctor. Seek immediate medical attention if the pain or disability is severe. You may have a torn (ruptured) Achilles tendon.

**Causes:** Achilles tendinitis is caused by repetitive or intense strain on the Achilles tendon. This tendon is used when you walk, run, jump, or push up on your toes. The structure of the Achilles tendon weakens with age, which can make it more susceptible to injury – particularly in people who participate in sports only on the weekends, or who have suddenly increased the intensity of their running or exercise program.

**Risk Factors:** A number of factors may increase your risk of Achilles tendinitis, including:

- **Age** – Achilles tendinitis is more common as you age.
- **Gender** – Achilles tendinitis occurs most commonly in men.
- **Physical Problems** – A naturally flat arch in your foot can put more strain on the Achilles tendon. Obesity and tight calf muscles also can increase tendon strain.
- **Training Choices** – Running in worn-out shoes can increase your risk of Achilles tendinitis. Tendon pain occurs more frequently in cold weather than in warm weather, and running on hilly terrain also can predispose you to Achilles injury.
- **Medical Conditions** – People who have psoriasis or high blood pressure are at higher risk of developing Achilles tendinitis.
- **Medications** – Certain types of antibiotics, called fluoroquinolones, have been associated with higher rates of Achilles tendinitis.

**Complications:** Achilles tendinitis can weaken the tendon, making it more vulnerable to a tear (rupture) – a painful injury that usually requires surgical repair.

**Prevention:** While it may not be possible to prevent Achilles tendinitis, you can reduce your risk:

- **Increase your activity level gradually** – If you're just beginning an exercise regimen, start slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of the training.
- **Take it easy** – Avoid activities that place excessive stress on your tendons, such as hill running. If you participate in a strenuous activity, warm up first by exercising at a slower pace. If you notice pain during a particular exercise, stop and rest.

- **Choose your shoes carefully** – The shoes you wear while exercising should provide adequate cushioning for your heel and should have a firm arch support to help reduce the tension in the Achilles tendon. Replace your worn-out shoes. If your shoes are in good condition, but don't support your feet, try arch supports in both shoes.
- **Stretch daily** – Stretch your calf muscles and Achilles tendon daily in the morning, before exercise, and after exercise to maintain flexibility and to avoid a recurrence of Achilles tendinitis.
- **Strengthen your calf muscles** – Strong calf muscles enable the calf and Achilles tendon to better handle the stresses they encounter with activity and exercise.
- **Cross-train** – Alternate high-impact activities, such as running and jumping, with low-impact activities, such as cycling and swimming.

**Treatment:** Tendinitis usually responds well to self-care measures. But if your signs and symptoms are severe or persistent, your doctor might suggest other treatment options.

**Medications:** If over-the-counter pain medications – such as ibuprofen and naproxen sodium – aren't enough, your doctor might prescribe stronger medications to reduce inflammation and relieve pain.

**Physical Therapy:** A physical therapist might suggest some of the following treatment options:

- **Exercises** – Therapists often prescribe specific stretching and strengthening exercises to promote healing and strengthening of the Achilles tendon and its supporting structures. A special type of strengthening called “eccentric” strengthening, involving a slow let down of a weight after raising it, has been found to be especially helpful for persistent Achilles problems.
- **Orthotic Devices** – A shoe insert that slightly elevates your heel can relieve strain on the tendon and provide a cushion that lessens the amount of force exerted on your Achilles tendon. Your doctor might prescribe off-the-shelf or custom-fitted arch supports (orthotics) to help distribute pressure to your feet more evenly.

**Lifestyle and Home Remedies:** If several months of more-conservative treatments To reduce the pain of plantar fasciitis, try these self-care tips:

- **Maintain a healthy weight** - Lose weight if you're overweight to minimize stress on the feet.
- **Choose supportive shoes** - Avoid high heels. Buy shoes with a low to moderate heel, good arch support, and shock absorbency. Don't go barefoot, especially on hard surfaces.
- **Don't wear worn-out athletic shoes** - Replace your old shoes before they stop supporting and cushioning your feet. If you're a runner, buy new shoes after 400-500 miles of use.
- **Change your sport** - Try a low-impact sport, such as swimming or bicycling.
- **Apply ice** - Held a cloth-covered ice pack over the area of pain for 15-20 minutes, 3-4 times a day, or after activity. Try ice massage: Freeze a water-filled paper cup and roll it over the site of discomfort for 5-7 minutes. Regular ice massage can help reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Stretch your arches** - Simple home exercises can stretch your plantar fascia, Achilles tendon, and calf muscles.

Source: Mayo Clinic

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