

# Achilles tendinopathy

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## Information for patients

This leaflet has simple information and advice on how to manage your achilles tendinopathy. If you have any queries or concerns please contact your GP.

### What is an achilles tendinopathy?

The achilles tendon connects the muscle at the back of your lower leg to your heel (calcaneus). This helps you go onto your tiptoes. An achilles tendinopathy is an injury to the achilles tendon. This does not mean that there is a tear, but instead the structure of the tendon may have changed.

### Mechanism of injury

This type of injury often happens due to an increase in activity or intensity that your body is not used to. Other factors that can cause this injury are being overweight, tight or weak calf muscles, stiff ankle joint or other ongoing physical health problems.

### Symptoms

You may develop swelling at the back of your ankle, local to your heel. This area will likely be painful to touch. You may notice an increase in pain or stiffness in the morning but also after a few hours or days after exercise. You may also find that your pain settles during continued exercise.

### Management

- Ice: a cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short-term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every three hours and up to four times a day, ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin.
- Relative rest: reduce activities that are making your symptoms worse, for example, the amount of time you spend on your feet.
- Painkillers: pain relief can help manage the discomfort in the short term. Normally painkillers bought from a pharmacist will work. If you have any questions please speak to a pharmacist.
- Footwear: supportive footwear or shoes with a small heel can help reduce the pain in the early stages.
- Exercise: you should complete specific exercises that aim to increase the strength and stability of your ankle. This will assist in the healing process and help you return to normal activities. Please see below for suggestions of a graded exercise programme.

### Follow-up:

You do not routinely require physiotherapy for this type of injury, most find they improve with time and simple exercises. If your Achilles pain does not improve after 6 to 12 weeks then you may benefit from physiotherapy, we recommend you contact your GP to refer you to your local physiotherapy department.

## Healing

This type of injury can take approximately 6 to 9 months to resolve.

### What to expect

Weeks since injury	Rehabilitation plan
0 to 2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Use ice and elevation to help swelling</li><li>✓ Begin the 'Stage one exercises' on page 3 of this leaflet</li><li>✓ Follow the management advice as per above</li></ul>
2 to 6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Once your pain has begun to settle, start the exercises below labelled 'Stage two exercises'.</li></ul>
6 to 12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Once you are able to complete 'Stage two exercises' then progress onto the next stage. You may be able to progress onto these earlier than 6 weeks if your pain has reduced, sometimes it can take longer than 6 weeks to progress.</li></ul>
12 to 24 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Once you are able to complete 'Stage three exercises' then progress onto the next stage. You may be able to progress onto these earlier than 6 weeks if your pain has reduced, sometimes it can take longer than 6 weeks to progress.</li><li>✓ When you can complete the 'Stage four exercises' without any discomfort you can gradually return to jogging. Start off running a short distance at a slow speed, then gradually increase your distance without increasing the speed.</li></ul>

### Initial advice

#### Rest and elevation

Try to rest the foot for the first 24 to 72 hours (1 to 3 days) to allow the early stage of healing to begin. Raise your ankle above the level of your hips to reduce swelling. You can use pillows or a stool to keep your foot up.

#### Early movement and exercise

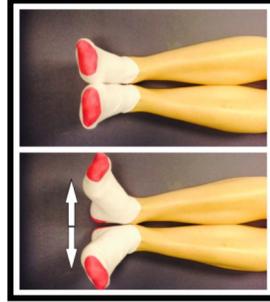
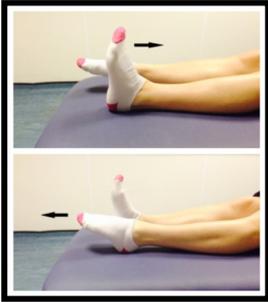
Early movement of the ankle and foot is important to promote circulation and reduce the risk of developing a DVT (blood clot). Follow the exercises below without causing too much pain. This will ensure your ankle and foot do not become too stiff.

Early weight bearing (putting weight through your injured foot) helps increase the speed of healing. Try to walk as normally as possible as this will help with your recovery.

### Stage one (3 to 4 times a day)

Ankle and foot range of movement exercises. Repeat these 10 times each.

1. Point your foot up and down within a comfortable range of movement.
2. Make circles with your foot in one direction and then change direction.
3. With your heels together move your toes apart as shown in the picture.



### Seated calf raise



Position yourself sitting on a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Slowly raise your heels up off the floor so you are now on your tiptoes. Then gradually lower your heels back down so your feet are flat on the ground.

Initially complete this 8 to 14 times, as this becomes less painful and easier you can then complete this up to 20 times.

### Balance



Level 1: Stand holding onto a chair or firm surface. Practice standing on your previously injured ankle for up to 30 seconds. Once you have achieved this move to level 2.

Level 2: Once standing on one leg attempt to release your grip on the chair/ surface and hold for up to 30 seconds. Once you have achieved this move to level 3.

Level 3: Once standing freely on one leg without support you can attempt to close your eyes for up to 30 seconds.

## Stage two exercises

Once you can easily complete the above exercises without discomfort then move onto the exercises below.

### Calf raises



Level 1: Stand holding onto a chair or firm surface. Practice standing on your tiptoes by lifting your heel off the ground. Complete this 12 times and three times a day. Once you have achieved this move to level 2.

Level 2: Stand with your heels off the edge of a step and your forefoot firmly on the step. Slowly lower your heels down and then up so you are on to your tiptoes. Complete this 12 times and three times a day.

## Developing dynamic ankle control required for sports



Level 1: Walk on the spot on a soft surface e.g. a cushion under a mat. Look straight ahead while staying upright.

Level 2: Attempt to stand on one leg on the uneven surface holding it for up to 30 seconds. Trial it with your good leg first.

Level 3: Attempt level 2 exercises but closing your eyes. Again try the good one first to see how hard it is.

## Developing core control required for sports

Level 1: Stand with one foot in front of the other, with your hands together. Swing your arms in a figure eight in both directions for 1-2 mins or as able.

Level 2: As level 1, but bring your feet so they are touching toe to heel.

Level 3: As level 1/2 but with your eyes closed.

## Stage three exercises

Once you can easily complete the above exercises without discomfort then move onto the exercises below.

### Developing your strength:



Level 1: Stand with one foot on the floor whilst holding onto a chair or firm surface. Practice standing on your tiptoes by lifting your heel off the ground. Complete 12 times and three times a day, repeat with the other foot. Once you have achieved this move to level 2.

Level 2: Stand with one foot on a step, with your heel off the edge of a step and your forefoot firmly on the step. Slowly lower your heel down and then up so you are on to your tiptoes. Complete these 12 times and three times a day, repeat with the other foot.

## Stage four exercises

Once you can easily complete the above exercises without discomfort then move onto the exercises below.

### Jumping



Level 1: Position yourself on a firm surface with your feet shoulder width apart. Practice jumping on the spot, landing softly and quietly to increase your ankle control.

Complete this 8 to 12 times for three sets, every other day. Once you have achieved this with minimal/nil discomfort then move to level 2.



Level 2: Position yourself on a firm surface, standing on one foot. Practice hopping on the spot, landing softly and quietly to increase your ankle control.

Complete this for 30 to 60 seconds for three sets, every other day. Repeat with the other foot. Once you have achieved this with minimal/nil discomfort then move to level 3.

Level 3: Position yourself on a firm surface, standing on one foot. Practice hopping forwards and then backwards, landing softly and quietly to increase your ankle control. Complete this for 30-60 seconds for three sets, every other day. Repeat with the other foot. Once you have achieved this with minimal/nil discomfort you can then practice hopping side to side.

## Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleden Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: [kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)

You can also contact us by using our online form at [www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals](http://www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals)

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.**