

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Achilles tendinopathy

This leaflet provides information on the common injury of Achilles tendinopathy and an overview of treatment options.

What is the injury?

The Achilles tendon is the large tendon at the back of the ankle. It connects the large calf muscles to the heel bone. Just like joints, the Achilles tendon is also subject to degenerative changes and this can result in Achilles tendinopathy. However, this can be improved with the correct management.



Just like any other tendon in the body, it can sometimes be overloaded or underloaded, which causes discomfort and pain.

Achilles tendinopathy is typically seen in running or jumping activities but can occur in people who do not play sport.

Ill-fitting shoes can cause tendon irritation by changing the load on the Achilles.

What are the signs and symptoms?

People usually complain of pain and stiffness up the back of the ankle, especially in the morning. The symptoms normally start gradually. Pain typically occurs while running or walking, (especially uphill or on stairs), and subsides with rest. The tendon may feel hot and swollen, and may feel lumpy to touch.

In the short term, you can help yourself by:

- **Reducing** the amount of running/walking you do. Gentle movements are advised after any periods of rest.
- **Shoes** - wearing a small heel will reduce the stretch on the Achilles. You could place a heel lift insert into both shoes.
- **Ice** - applying ice to the tendon area for ten to fifteen minutes to help reduce any inflammation and soreness. Crushed ice or frozen peas, wrapped in a damp towel, are ideal. Do not apply ice directly onto the skin.

What treatment options are available?

Pain relief

Please talk to your GP and/or pharmacist about appropriate pain relief.

For example, you could take pain controlling medications or anti-inflammatory drugs.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy may help with more severe cases of Achilles tendinopathy if symptoms are not settling.

A physiotherapist can advise on exercises and develop a specific stretching and strengthening exercise programme. Your physiotherapist will advise you on the most appropriate treatments for you.

Orthotics/podiatrist

If your symptoms do not settle within a few months, you may benefit from a review with orthotics or a podiatrist to look at your footwear.

PRP injections/surgery

You may be referred to an orthopaedic consultant for further advice. They may look at PRP (platelet-rich plasma) injections. Surgery may be considered if the conservative treatments above are unsuccessful or if the consultant deems it necessary.

Factors affecting healing

Normal healing normally lasts six to twelve weeks. However, experiencing discomfort and swelling for longer than this is normal for this type of injury.

Staying on top of the following factors can help move the healing process along and give your Achilles the best chance of recovery.

- **Stress relief** - utilise techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and deep breathing cycles. Speak to your healthcare professional for more information.

- **Sleep hygiene** - consistently getting 6-9 hours is recommended by the NHS. Only use your bedroom for sleep, e.g. not for TV.
- **Nutrition** - make sure you have a balanced diet. Vitamin D has been correlated with reduction in joint pain.
- **Alcohol** – avoid alcohol in the early stages of healing (first three days). Evidence has shown this can slow down recovery and increase the chances of re-injury.
- **Smoking** – this has been linked with musculoskeletal pain and delayed healing. For more advice call the Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044 to speak to a trained adviser or ask your therapist for more information.
- **General exercise** – general cardiovascular exercise, such as a brisk walk each day, stimulates blood flow to the area, as long as you are not irritating the Achilles.

If your symptoms significantly worsen and you are unable to manage them, please contact your GP or physiotherapist.

Contact details

Physiotherapy Outpatients Department
Clinic 10
King's Treatment Centre
King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
Notts
NG17 4JL

Contact number: 01623 672384.
Reception opening times: 8am – 4.15pm,
Monday to Friday.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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