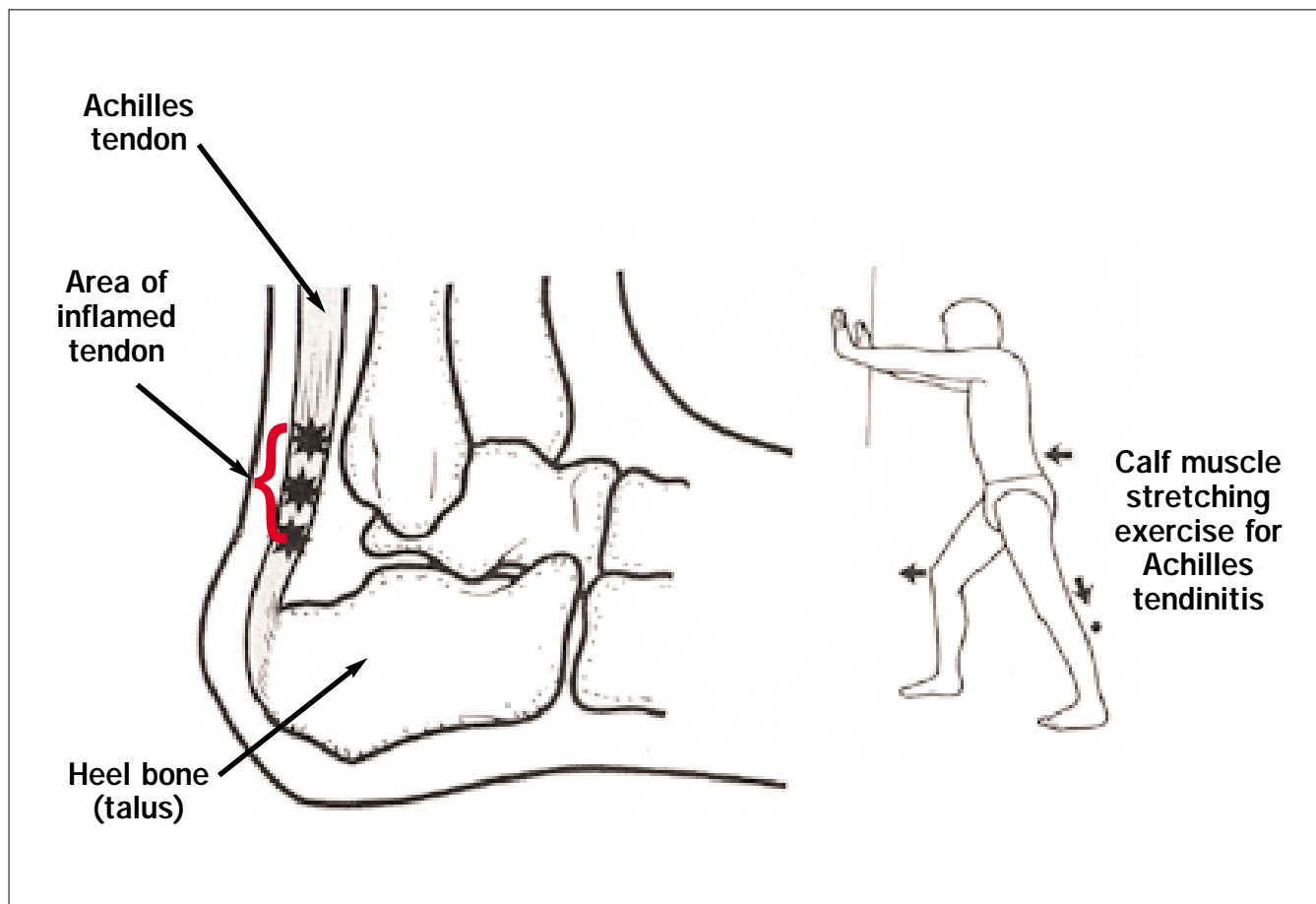


Achilles tendinitis



What is Achilles tendinitis?

It is inflammation of the Achilles tendon, a large tendon connecting the calf muscle of the lower leg to the calcaneum (the largest bone of the foot).

What is the cause of Achilles tendinitis?

It is caused by overuse of the calf muscles, which are responsible for flexing the foot downwards. If, with excessive use, there is considerable friction on and around the tendon, this leads to inflammation.

Who gets Achilles tendinitis?

Anyone can get Achilles tendinitis, but it is most common in young to middle-aged males, particularly those participating in athletics and other sporting activities.

It is most likely to develop in people who have taken up unaccustomed running, long walks or other exercise. It is often seen in people who have competed in a long or rigorous sporting event and also in runners who have changed their routine.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain in and around the heel and ankle.
- Pain worse on rising in the morning.
- Pain worse on starting activity and for some time after ceasing it.

- A deep ache on using the calf muscles.
- Stiffness in the tendon.
- Tenderness of the tendon.
- A clicking or similar noise on moving the tendon.
- Swelling of the heel and ankle.

What are the risks?

It is not a serious problem but can take many weeks or months to settle if not rested and treated properly. In such cases, the tendon can become weakened and may eventually rupture. This is more likely to occur if cortisone injections are given into or close to the tendon.

What is the treatment?

- Rest is important. It is advisable to use crutches if the pain is severe, and a plaster cast is sometimes applied for very severe cases.
- Use comfortable, high-heeled shoes for both feet. It may be better to use a 2cm heel raise. A raised heel reduces the tension in the tendon.
- Cool the tendon with icepacks when it is painful and swollen. When the swelling settles, use heat packs.
- Apply a firm, stretch elastic bandage around the ankle or an elastic ankle support to achieve some degree of immobil-

isation and support.

- Use analgesics (pain-killers), preferably paracetamol, if there is significant discomfort.
- Use NSAIDs for at least 2-3 weeks during the initial acute phase.
- Gently massage the tendon by holding it firmly between the fingers and moving it from side to side.
- Do stretching exercises. This includes stretching the calf muscles with the heel firmly on the ground. Another method is to lie on your back, lift the affected leg straight up, place a cord or wide ribbon around the base of the toes and flex the foot repeatedly by pulling the cord towards you.

Note — good early treatment, especially rest, is important, because the problem can be difficult to treat and may persist if you return too early to your usual activities.

Achilles tendinitis usually resolves in 4-8 weeks.

How can the problem be prevented?

- Warm-up and stretching exercises in athletes are helpful.
- Wear good-quality shoes with a substantial heel.
- A 1cm heel raise can be helpful.

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