

ACHILLES TENDINOPATHY

HOW TO RECOVER SUCCESSFULLY

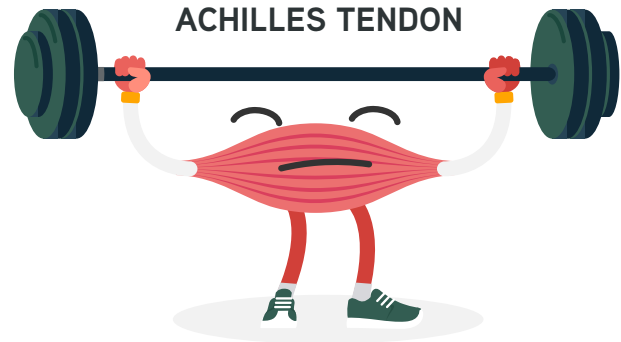
This information is designed to be used only under the care and advice of your trained health professional. Please consult your health professional with all questions and concerns.

WHAT IS ACHILLES TENDINOPATHY?

Your Achilles tendon is incredibly strong, but currently sensitive and painful.

The Achilles tendon is the strongest and thickest tendon in the body. It's made up of thousands of fibres interwoven together like a complex rope and it can manage huge stresses including loads of multiple times your body weight. Unlike rope it can **adapt to activities given time**.

When your Achilles tendon is overloaded or not given enough time to adapt, the tendon becomes sensitive and painful and can swell in response. It's still incredibly strong but that sensitivity to load means it can be sore, even with low level activities it usually copes well with.



WHAT CAUSES ACHILLES TENDINOPATHY?

Increasing running distance, training frequency or speed too quickly or adding in lots of hill running can irritate the Achilles tendon.

The majority of running injuries, including Achilles tendinopathy are linked to how much you train and how quickly it increases.



OTHER FACTORS CAN PLAY A ROLE TOO SUCH AS

- Your running gait.
- How well you recover.
- Other activities/ sports you do.
- Lifestyle factors like sleep and stress.
- General health and previous medical history can also influence the tendon e.g. hormone level changes in peri-menopausal women, altered thyroid function and diabetes all affect the tendon and can be a piece of the puzzle.



DOES RUNNING OR EXERCISE HARM THE ACHILLES TENDON?

- Running or exercising at a level the tendon can manage stimulates the tendon to adapt and remain strong, rather than harm it.
- If you run too much it's very hard to reduce your symptoms.
- Your pain is a sign of sensitivity, like how pressing a bruise is often painful. It hurts because there is pressure on sensitive tissue, not because it's being harmed.
- We want this sensitivity to settle and staying active at the right level can help this.

HOW CAN WE FIX IT?

The body is pretty amazing! If we create the right environment for it in terms of activity levels and recovery it will adapt and symptoms will settle. Your treatment will normally have three phases:

Phase 1 “Calm it down”.

Modify or reduce painful activities like running to a level the Achilles can manage. This allows any irritation to settle.



Phase 2 “Strengthen”.

- Build strength in the calf muscles which also stimulates the tendon to become stronger.

- Additional exercises for other key muscles like the quads, glutes and hamstrings may help too.



Phase 3 “Build back up”. When symptoms have settled we can start phase 3 and gradually build your running distance, frequency and intensity towards your training goals.



These 3 phases can overlap and often vary between different people depending on individual need.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

- Recovery timeframes vary and are difficult to predict.
- Some patients see improvements in as little as 2 to 4 weeks, however returning to your normal training is likely to take longer, especially if you have challenging goals to achieve.
- It's important to allow time and be consistent with rehab as it can take 12 weeks or more to see significant improvements.
- If the symptoms have been with you a long time or are particularly severe and you've had to stop running altogether it usually takes longer to recover.
- With time and consistency you can get great results!



**Walking 30 mins
with minimal pain**



PAIN AND ACTIVITY TRAFFIC LIGHT



6-10 EXCESSIVE

4-5 ACCEPTABLE

0-3 SAFEZONE

Mild pain during activity
is fine providing it settles
within 24 hours

HOW SHOULD I MODIFY MY TRAINING?

- If your pain is severe and troubling you with everyday activities like walking and going up/ down stairs it's best to take a break from running to let things settle.
- Prolonged tendon stiffness each morning can also be a sign that it needs time to settle.
- If you can walk around 30 minutes with minimal pain and most daily activities are comfortable it's often ok to return to running (or continue at a manageable level) under the guidance of your health professional.
- If you continue training we recommend using our traffic light system to guide you in modifying it to a manageable level.
 - The aim is to reduce or adapt your training so that pain during a run is mild (0 - 3 out of 10, where 10 is the worst pain you can imagine) and settles within 24 hours.

For example, running 5km results in a mild pain of 2-3 out of 10 but that pain settles quickly after the run. Running 6km causes more severe pain to develop during the run, up to 5-6 out of 10, and the symptoms are still aggravated over 24 hours later. In this situation it would usually be ok to keep running up to around the 5km distance but 6km is likely too much at this point.



✓ HOW DO I PREVENT IT HAPPENING AGAIN?

The best approach is to ensure you build your training gradually and plan recovery into it. This can include recovery days within each week as well as a recovery week roughly every fourth week when your training volume is reduced.

Once you've achieved your rehab goals it's a good idea to keep it going once or twice per week to maintain your strength and support your running.

✓ WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO HELP MY RECOVERY?

Your body will recovery more quickly if you take good care of it! Try to get 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep per night. Below are 10 top tips to help with this. There is evidence that stress can delay healing so seek help for your mental wellbeing, especially if you feel low in mood, stressed or anxious.



TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE SLEEP FOR ATHLETE RECOVERY AND PERFORMANCE

Based on research by Bird et al. (2013), Bonnar et al. (2018) and work from The Centre for Sleep and Human Performance.

- ✓ Increasing how long you sleep at night has the most evidence for improving performance and reducing daytime tiredness.
- ✓ 7 to 9 hours sleep per night is recommended for healthy adults but **athletes may need 9 to 10 hours.**
- ✓ Day time napping may help to extend sleep and reduce effects of sleep deprivation. Consider timing and length of sleep - 20 to 30 mins may be sufficient.
- ✓ Optimising sleep is especially important as training load increases. **Train more, sleep more!**
- ✓ Consider adjusting training to extend sleep - for example changing times for late night or early morning sessions.
- ✓ **Develop a regular sleep routine** and habits especially waking times. Limit sleeping in on the weekends within 1 hour or normal waking time.
- ✓ Learn coping strategies for worry and anxiety that affects sleep such as relaxation techniques and guided imagery.
- ✓ Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine in the hours before sleep.
- ✓ **Wind down before bed** and restrict stimulating activities such as "screen time".
- ✓ **Create a comfortable bedroom environment** - cool, dark and quiet (use earplugs/ eye masks if necessary).



WHAT REHAB SHOULD I DO?

We've developed a programme tailored to your needs:

[illegible]