

## thepodiatrist.net.au

15 Cohoe Street  
(cnr Ipswich Street)  
Toowoomba Q 4350  
p 07 4638 3022  
f 07 4632 1441  
e admin@thepodiatrist.net.au

### If you have or suspect you have Achilles tendon tendinopathy

You shouldn't ignore the problem. Your pain may get better as you exercise; however, the exercise you are doing may be interfering with the healing process and be causing further damage. This can lead to your injury getting worse such that your pain does not 'warm up' and you feel it throughout participation. If this occurs, your recovery may be prolonged and it may take a number of months for you to return to full activity.

Achilles tendinopathy refers to degeneration within the large tendon which joins the calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the heel bone (calcaneus).

### How does it happen?

Achilles tendinopathy is a common injury in sports involving running and jumping, and results from overuse of the tendon. It may also occur over time secondary to poor biomechanics. The function of the Achilles tendon is to transmit forces produced by the calf muscles to the heel bone. Repetitive use of the calf muscles and, therefore, the Achilles tendon can lead to microscopic tears within the substance of the tendon. To repair these microscopic tears, the body commences an inflammatory response. Although this response is initially part of the healing process, when the stresses are repeated, the inflammation is prolonged and so produces local tissue damage. Factors which may contribute to Achilles tendinopathy include a recent change in training (including frequency, duration, intensity, training surfaces), reduced rest times, biomechanical abnormalities, poor footwear, and decreased muscle flexibility and joint range of motion. These factors can lead to increased stress on the Achilles tendon, microtears and subsequent tendinopathy.

### How does it feel?

Achilles tendinopathy results in pain within the tendon just above where it attaches to the heel bone. This pain typically develops gradually. Initially, the tendon may only be painful following exercise. For example, it may be first felt on rising the day following increased activity. Associated with the pain may be stiffness or tightness in the Achilles region. Typically, these initial signs of Achilles tendinopathy disappear quickly with walking about or applying heat (i.e. a hot shower) over the region. However, as you continue to exercise, the tendinopathy progresses and the pain within the tendon becomes more intense and more frequent and may last all day rather than intermittently.

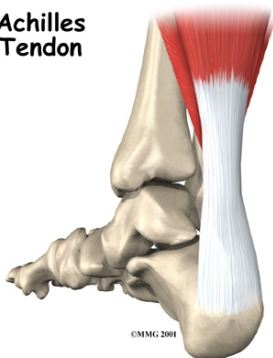
### What should you do?

Achilles tendinopathy generally does not settle without assessment and intervention. If you have or suspect you have Achilles tendinopathy, you should consult your nearest podiatrist. In the meantime, you can begin initial treatment. This should consist of icing following participation and regular calf stretching. Icing may consist of crushed ice wrapped in a moist towel applied for 15-20 minutes or ice in a paper cup massaged up and down over the Achilles region until the skin is numb.

### Management

The assistance of a podiatrist is important in the treatment of Achilles tendinopathy. Initially, we can assist in diagnosing the problem and establishing its severity. We will determine an appropriate treatment plan and timeframe for improvement. This involves activity modification, soft tissue treatment such as massage and stretching, correction of your biomechanics using orthoses, and the progression through a series of specific strengthening exercises. Anti-inflammatory medication may be indicated in certain cases. Local cortisone injection is generally not advised.

**Achilles Tendon**



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## Treatment checklist

- Rest - a reduction or complete stop to activity until pain improves or resolves must be adhered to.
- You have been provided with heel raises, these should be worn with shoes, preferably joggers or supportive footwear, at all times.
- Heat or cold therapy may be indicated in some cases, please follow the routine that has been prescribed for you.
- Stretching of the calf muscle should commence as soon as possible, as directed by your podiatrist.
- You may be provided with a pair of orthoses depending on the way you walk and the nature of your activity, break these in slowly and wear as much as possible.
- Deep tissue massage may be indicated for certain cases, please attempt to follow this advice as soon as possible.