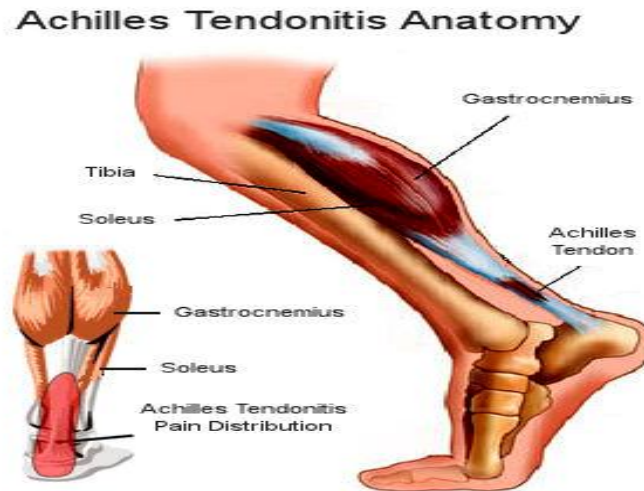


The Achilles tendon is the large band of tissues connecting the muscles in the back of your calf to your heel bone and is the largest and strongest tendon in the human body. Also called the heel cord, the Achilles tendon is used when you walk, run, jump, or push up on your toes.

Achilles tendonitis is present when your Achilles tendon becomes inflamed or irritated. Achilles tendonitis also is often associated with a sudden increase in the intensity or frequency of exercise, hence why so many endurance based athletes suffer from the condition. When treated promptly, Achilles tendonitis is often short-lived. Left untreated, Achilles tendonitis could cause persistent pain or potentially cause your tendon to tear through lack of treatment and rehab exercises. If so, you may need surgery to correct the damage.



Signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms of Achilles tendonitis often develop gradually. They include:

- Dull ache or pain when pushing off of your foot during walking or rising on toes
- Tenderness over your Achilles tendon
- Stiffness that lessens as your tendon warms up
- Mild swelling or a bump on your tendon
- A cracking sound when you touch or move the Achilles tendon.

You may notice that the affected tendon is sore when you get up in the morning or after you've rested, improves slightly once you start moving around, and then worsens again when you increase your activity level.

Cause

Improper conditioning

Achilles tendonitis is most common among athletes whose bodies aren't properly conditioned for their sport or activity. Inadequate flexibility and strength of the calf muscles can contribute to overload of the tendon. Frequent stops and starts during the activity, as well as activities that require repeated jumping can also increase your risk of Achilles tendonitis.

Flattened arch

Flattening of the arch of your foot (excessive pronation) can place you at increased risk of developing Achilles tendonitis.

Treatments

If you've tried self-care measures, such as rest, ice and over-the-counter pain relievers, and they aren't working for you, your doctor may suggest other Achilles tendonitis treatments:

Orthotic devices

A temporary foot insert (orthotic device) that elevates your heel within your shoe may relieve strain on the stretched tendon. Your doctor also might prescribe special heel pads or cups to wear in your shoes to cushion and support your heel, or a splint to wear at night that will keep the Achilles tendon stretched while you sleep.

Sports Massage

A sports therapist will aid you to a quicker recovery by performing massage techniques on the injured Achilles tendon in order to break up scar tissue, promote healing, and increase blood flow to the injured area.

Prevention

While it may not be possible to prevent Achilles tendonitis, you can take measures to reduce your risk: Increase your activity level gradually. If you're just beginning training, don't feel like you have to be Ironman-ready in record time. Starting slowly will help you determine your limits and follow a sensible training program.