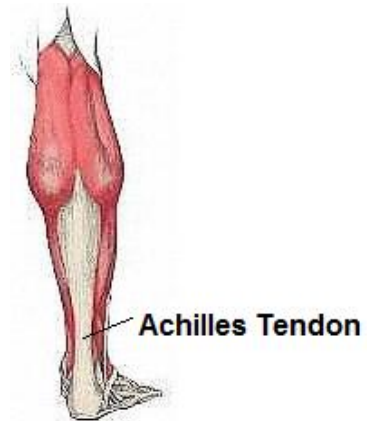


## Achilles Tendonopathy

### ⦿ What is it?

*Achilles Tendonopathy (AT)* is a condition affecting the lower leg, just above the heel. The Achilles Tendon is the thick, cord-like structure that joins the calf muscle to the heel bone. When it is overused, as is often the case in running and similar activities, it can become inflamed, causing pain and discomfort.

The Achilles Tendon is the largest tendon in the body, and is very important because it lets you lift your heel when you walk. It also helps you run, jump and stand on your toes. It is for this reason that having Achilles Tendonitis can significantly affect mobility.



### ⦿ What causes it?

AT can be caused by any movement that places the Achilles Tendon under abnormal or excessive stress. This includes:

- Excessive rolling in/pronation of the feet – flattening of the arch pulls on the calf muscles and places the Achilles under strain.
- Overuse – overtraining or starting a new activity may stress the Achilles until it develops small tears. Running uphill also works the Achilles harder.
- Sudden change in training surface – runners that switch to harder surfaces that offer less shock absorption may trigger pain.
- Recent weight gain – will increase stress on the legs
- Constant wearing high heeled shoes – relaxes the Achilles, so when flatter shoes are worn, it is strained.
- Arthritis – AT can be a part of generalised inflammatory arthritis.

### ⦿ What are the symptoms?

In **acute** cases, pain is described as a burning sensation above the heel, worst when standing up in the morning, and at the beginning of particular exercises. Pain worsens during the exercise, and improves with rest. Swelling, warmth and redness often accompany the pain - typical signs of inflammation.

If poorly managed, **chronic** AT can often follow. Sufferers report pain at the start of an activity, which settles down after a warm-up, but returns following the activity. Eventually pain increases to the point where the activity can no longer be performed.

In both acute and chronic cases, nodules or lumps may be present on the Achilles Tendon, about 2cm above the heel.

## ⦿ How is it treated?

The objective of treatment is to reduce pain, inflammation, stress on the Achilles Tendon. Treatment will depend on the underlying cause, however successful treatment usually involves one or more of the following:

- *Rest/Icing* – reduces inflammation and provides pain relief after sport
- *Heel Raises* – placed inside the shoe and reduce Achilles tension
- *Orthotics* – correct overpronation that may be straining the Achilles
- *Calf Stretches* – only to be performed once pain and inflammation have settled
- *Appropriate footwear* – with good shock absorption and arch support if required
- *Anti-inflammatories* - gels (Voltaren), or non-steroidals (Mobic)

## ⦿ How can orthotics help?

A pair of custom made or off-the shelf orthotics can help reduce the symptoms of AT by correcting abnormal rolling in/flattening of the feet. This will reduce the tightness of the Achilles, so there is less strain on its attachment point at the heel. Orthotics can also provide additional cushioning to the heel. Heel raises can also be built into orthotics to further reduce Achilles tension.

## ⦿ Icing Program

Icing the heel after aggravating activities helps to reduce the pain of AT.

*HOW OFTEN? – 2 x 15 minute sessions per day, and after sporting activities*

## ⦿ Stretching Program

With one knee bent and one knee straight, lean forward against a wall with both heels touching the ground. You should feel a stretch in your calf, usually just below the knee, as you do this.

Hold for **30 seconds** before switching to the other side. Then repeat with both knees bent to feel the stretch lower down near the heel.



*HOW OFTEN? – 30 seconds each side, 4 times a day, and BEFORE and AFTER sporting activities.*

### IMPORTANT:

**STRETCHES MUST ONLY BE PERFORMED AFTER PAIN AND INFLAMMATION HAVE BEGUN TO SUBSIDE!!!**