



Achilles Tendinitis

Treatment and Restoration of Motion



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Achilles tendinitis

The Achilles tendon is the largest tendon in the body and connects the calf muscle to the heel bone. It plays an important role in walking, running and jumping.

Repetitive overuse or injury can cause the heel or calf area to become irritated, inflamed and/or torn, leading to Achilles tendinitis.

Other causes of Achilles tendinitis include exercising on inclines such as running uphill; exercising too much or too intensely; wearing improperly fitting shoes including high heels; and having tight calf muscles and over-pronated feet.

Symptoms

Achilles tendinitis commonly presents with pain, tenderness and swelling over the tendon. There is increased pain raising up onto the toes, and it is often accompanied with limited range of motion.

Treatment

Most patients find relief with conservative treatment. This includes:

Rest: Rest from all activities that cause pain to give your tendon time to heal.

Ice: Place an ice bag on the affected area for 15 to 20 minutes. Repeat four to five times a day.

Elevate: Elevate the affected leg.

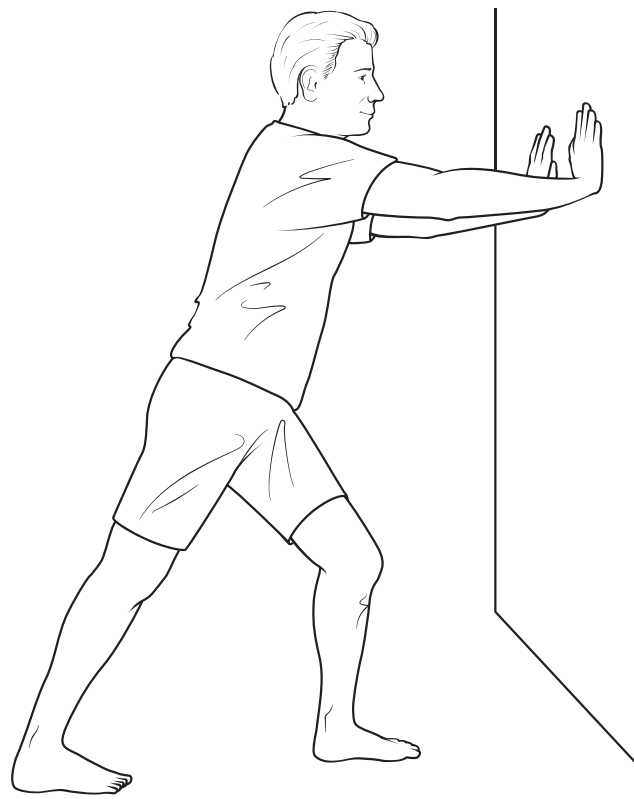
Anti-inflammatory drugs: Oral anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen will relieve pain and reduce swelling.

Exercises: Stretching and strengthening exercises described in this guide will help to alleviate pain and provide relief.

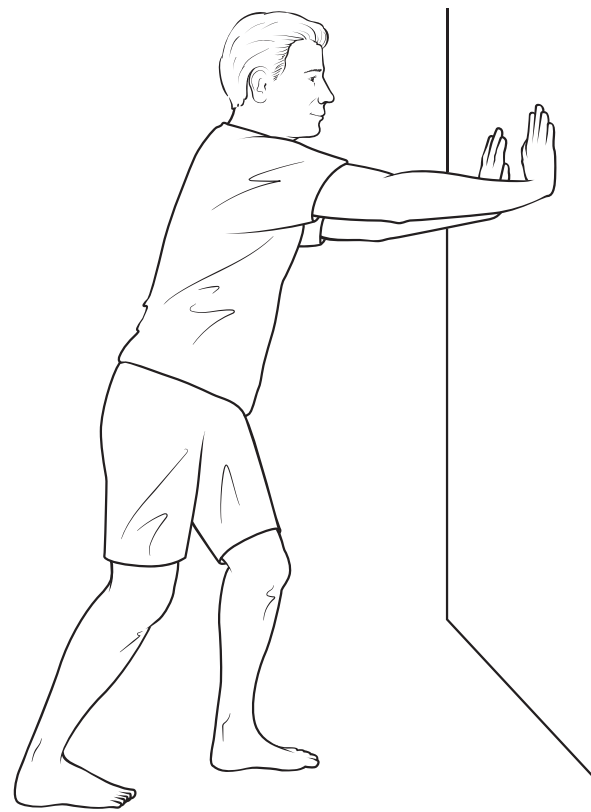
Shoe inserts: Some patients may find additional relief with the use of heel lifts or shoe inserts. For more chronic or severe episodes, formal physical therapy and/or placement into a walking boot or cast may be necessary.

Stretching exercises

Gastrocnemius stretch: Stand with the affected foot back, leg straight, forward leg bent. Keeping your heel on the floor, turned slightly out, lean into wall until the stretch is felt in the calf. Hold 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat three times per set. Do one set per session, once or twice daily.



Soleus stretch: Stand with the affected foot back, both knees bent. Keeping your heel on the floor, turned slightly out, lean into the wall until stretch is felt in your lower calf. Hold 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat three times per set. Do one set per session, once or twice daily.

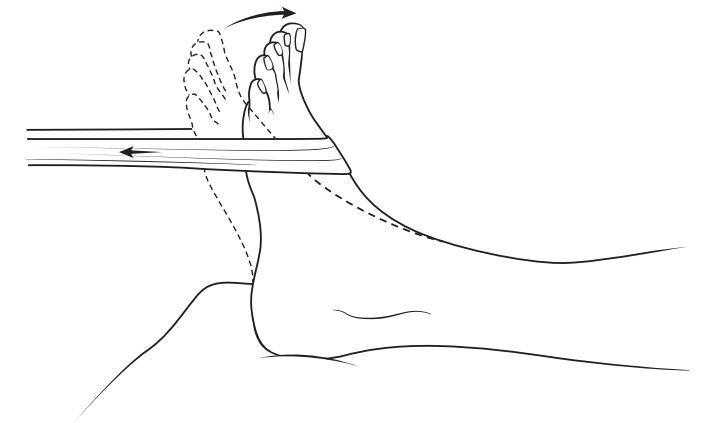


Strengthening exercises

Single leg stance/balance: From a standing position with your feet together, lift the unaffected foot off the floor, balancing on your affected leg. Maintain your balance in this position. Try not to move your arms away from your body or let your weight shift from side to side. Once you're able to maintain this balance for 60 seconds, try performing on a folded blanket or towel, or closing your eyes for an additional challenge. Perform two to three repetitions of up to 60 seconds, one to two times per day.

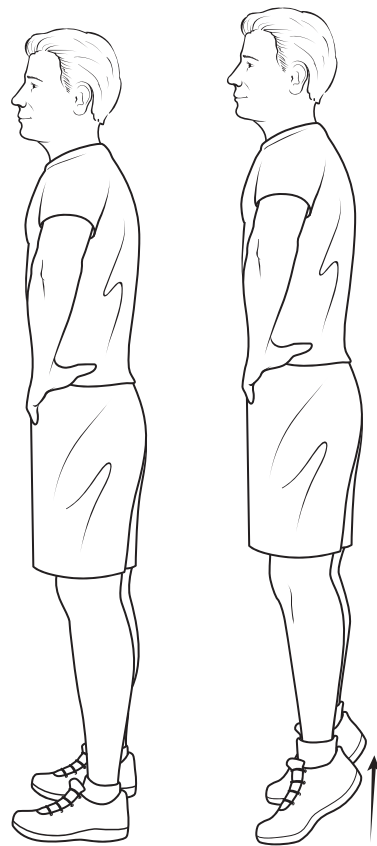


Dorsiflexion with resistance: Wrap elastic tubing (Thera band or exercise band) around the top of the affected foot, anchoring the other end under the leg of a chair or table (or have another person hold the band sitting across from you). With your leg straight on a bed or couch, pull your foot up towards your face. Return to starting position. Repeat 15 times per set, at a consistent pace. Do two sets per session, once or twice daily.



Strengthening exercises (continued)

Heel raise with controlled lowering: Standing on flat ground, barefoot or in tennis shoes, raise up onto the balls of the feet. Pick up your healthy foot. Return to ground slowly on affected limb. Return to starting position with both feet on ground. Repeat 15 times per set. Do two sets per session, once or twice daily. If this exercise becomes too easy, you may make it more challenging by performing it on a step or stair. (Be sure to have a railing to hold for balance if necessary.)



If home remedies do not improve symptoms within six to eight weeks, a follow-up evaluation with a podiatrist or orthopaedic surgeon may be necessary.



Prevention

People are more likely to get Achilles tendinitis if they put a lot of wear and tear on their tendon, such as through running and jumping. Maintaining a healthy weight and wearing supportive shoes may prevent Achilles tendinitis. Stretching exercises are also beneficial and should be done as recommended above.

If you would like further education regarding these or other exercises to help heal Achilles tendinitis, please call 630.933.1500 to schedule a consultation with a Northwestern Medicine physical therapist. TTY for the hearing impaired 630.933.4833.