

# Center for Athletic Medicine

830 W Diversey #300

Chicago IL 606014

773 248 4150

## What is an Achilles tendon injury?

The Achilles tendon is a band of tissue that connects the heel bone to the calf muscle in the leg. If injured, the tendon may become inflamed or torn. Achilles tendonitis is the term used when the tendon becomes inflamed. The inflammation causes pain in the back of your leg near the heel. An Achilles tear is called a rupture. It also causes pain near your heel.

## How does it occur?

Achilles tendonitis can be caused by the following:

Overuse of the Achilles tendon

Uphill running

Tight calf muscles

Tight Achilles tendons

Excessive amounts of intensity sports training

Switching racing shoes which have less heel lift

Over-pronation, a problem where your feet roll inward and flatten out more than normal when you walk or run

Wearing high heels at work and then switching to lower-heeled shoes for exercise

An Achilles tear may occur during a sudden activity. For example, the tendon might tear when you jump or sprint.

## What are the symptoms?

Pain and/or swelling over the Achilles tendon. You will have pain when you rise up on your toes and pain when you stretch the tendon. Range of motion of the ankle may be limited.

When the Achilles tendon tears or ruptures, you may feel a pop. If there is a complete tear, you may not be able to lift your heel off the ground or point your toes.

## How is it treated?

Ice the Achilles tendon for 20 to 30 minutes every 3-4 hours for the first 2 or 3 days

Elevate the lower leg by putting a pillow underneath when lying down

Prescription for an anti-inflammatory medication

Prescription for a heel lift insert for your shoe. The lift will provide support and prevents extra stretching of the Achilles tendon

Limit your sport activity or change to another that will not aggravate the condition (e.g. swim instead of run)

Exercises to stretch and strengthen the Achilles tendon

Prescription for orthotics—shoe inserts which help keep your foot stable.

Severe cases may require casting of the foot

## Center for Athletic Medicine

A tear or rupture may require surgery

### How long is recovery?

Everyone recovers from injuries at different rates. The goal is to return the patient to his/her sport or activity as soon as possible. Time is determined by how soon the tendon recovers. To return too soon may worsen the injury which could lead to permanent damage. You may be able to return to activity when you are able to complete the following:

Full range of motion in the injured leg compared to the uninjured leg

Full strength of the injured leg compared to the uninjured leg

Capable of jogging straight ahead without pain or limping

Sprint straight ahead without pain or limping

Able to do 45 degree cuts, at half speed then full speed

20 yard figure eights at half speed then full speed

90 degree cuts, first at half speed then at full speed

10 yard figure eights first at half speed then at full speed

Jump on both legs without pain

Jump on injured leg without pain

### Prevention of Achilles tendonitis

Always stretch the calf muscles and Achilles tendons before exercise/activity. If prone to tight calf muscles or Achilles tendons, stretch them twice a day whether or not you participate in sports activities. Avoid uphill running a lot.