

# Advice and exercises for Mid-portion Achilles tendinopathy

Therapies Department  
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## What is Achilles Tendinopathy?

Achilles tendinopathy involves pain and swelling of the strong tendon that attaches the calf muscle to the heel.

Most people experience a gradual improvement in symptoms and recover over 12 months or less.

The advice in this booklet will support you in managing your heel pain. Most people will get better gradually following this advice.

Some people that have longer term problems and have followed the exercises and advice in this booklet may be considered for other treatments.



## What are the symptoms?

- Pain in the Achilles tendon
- The pain is usually worse first thing in a morning or your first steps after a period of rest
- Walking usually improves the pain but can worsen after a period of walking or doing exercise



## Treatment

### Resting your heel for a short period of time

To settle down the pain try to limit aggravating activities for six weeks. This might be walking long distances and/or running. You may need to speak to others to make some changes during this period, such as employers to alter work patterns and activities.

After this period you will then need to start slowly building up your activities again back to normal. Build up how much you are doing things over a month or two.

It is usually advisable to wait until you can walk for several miles and be able to do the exercises in this booklet without aggravating your tendon pain before returning to jogging and running.

### Managing pain

As time goes on your tendon pain usually improves. Simple painkillers or creams may be helpful. Most of these can be sourced from your local pharmacist without a prescription. You can talk through the best options for you with a pharmacist.

Not all medicines suit everyone. If a medicine isn't working for you, or if you are experiencing unpleasant effects from it, then see your GP or pharmacist. They can review your medications and help find the right one for you.

### Using cold for pain relief

You could also try using cold over the area as this can ease pain.

Apply an ice pack wrapped in a damp towel and leave this on your heel for about 10 minutes.

After applying cold, wait for at least an hour before applying it again.

Please note:

- A towel needs to be used to protect your skin from getting burnt or irritated by the cold.
- Do not use a cream that numbs the area (analgesic cream) at the same time as using cold.
- If you have a medical condition that affects your circulation or sensation in the lower leg, please speak to a health professional before using cold for pain relief.

### Footwear

- Wear well fitted shoes that support your foot and cushion your heel. Some people get pain relief from using a gel heel cup or pad inserted into footwear. These can be moved between items of footwear. These are usually available at a pharmacy.

### Exercises to improve Achilles tendon pain

Exercises can help improve Achilles tendon pain considerably but require a lot of regular practice in order for them to have an effect. Some people find it helpful to make a note in a diary or on a calendar to keep track.

It takes months of exercise for the tendon to change long-term. Some people can get improvements within a few weeks of exercising, while others need to work at it for much longer. We recommend you keep up your exercises for at least 3 to 4 months. Some people may choose to continue for longer if they are still getting better or find them helpful.

You do not need to avoid pain completely while exercising, just work to the level that you can manage.

We advise that any pain that increases with exercise should settle within a few hours. If it takes longer than that then you could work at a lower level next time until your tendon gets used to exercise.

Some people find that their muscles and joints in their legs ache more generally for a few days after starting a new exercise or when increasing the amount. This is a normal response to doing more difficult exercises and generally gets better over time.

The exercises recommended for you are indicated by your physiotherapist by marking the box next to the description.

X

There is a QR code next to each exercise so you can view a video of the exercise being done. Alternatively, you can follow these web links to access the videos:

[www.ruh.nhs.uk/foot](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/foot)

[www.ruh.nhs.uk/ankle](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/ankle)



## Building strength and reducing pain

### Exercise 1: Getting stronger in sitting



- **Sit in a chair with your feet on a step or on some books.**
  - **Place a weight on your knees. You can use a rucksack with books or bottles of water inside.**
1. Start with your heel off of the edge.
  2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
  3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.
- Repeat \_\_\_ times.
- Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.

### Exercise 2: Static hold off a step



- **Stand with your heels off the edge of a step or block.**
  1. Start with your heel off of the edge and not letting the heels drop down.
  2. Hold this position for 30 seconds.
  3. Rest for 1 minute.
  4. Repeat \_\_\_ times.
  5. Once you can manage \_\_\_ repetitions, progress to standing on one leg.

### Exercise 3: Raise both heels with the knee straight



- **Stand with your heels off the edge of a step or block.**
  1. Start with your heel off of the edge.
  2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
  3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.

#### Exercise 4: Raise one heel with the knee straight



- **Stand with your heel off the edge of a step or block.**

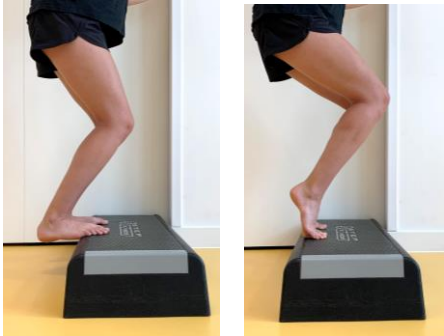
1. Start with your heel off of the edge.
2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.



### Exercise 5: Raise both heels with the knee bent



- **Stand with your heels off the edge of a step or block.**
  1. Start with your heel off of the edge.
  2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
  3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.



### Exercise 6: Raise one heel with the knee bent



- **Stand with your heel off the edge of a step or block.**

1. Start with your heel off of the edge.
2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.



### Exercise 7: Single knee dips

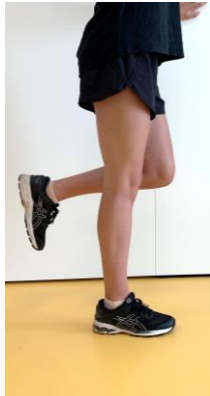


- **Stand on one leg.**
  1. Bend your standing leg slowly. Lower yourself as far as you can without your heel coming off the ground.
  2. Slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.

### Exercise 8: Mini hops on the spot



- **Stand on one leg with space around you.**
  1. Hop up on one leg.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again \_\_\_ times.

**If you have any concerns or problems with the advice or exercises you should contact the healthcare professional who recommended it.**

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email: [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656/ 826319.