

Advice and exercises for Insertional Achilles tendinopathy

Therapies Department
Foot and Ankle Orthopaedic Service

What is Achilles Heel pain?

Achilles heel pain involves pain and swelling where the strong tendon from the calf muscles attaches 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 heel
- The pain is usually worse when wearing footwear, first thing in a morning or when taking 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 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

- The heel cup of your footwear can contribute to heel pain persisting. Softer heel cups that do not rub or put pressure on the back of the heel can be very helpful.
- 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 heel pain

Exercises can help improve heel 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

www.ruh.nhs.uk/ankle

Building strength and reducing pain

Exercise 1: Getting stronger in sitting

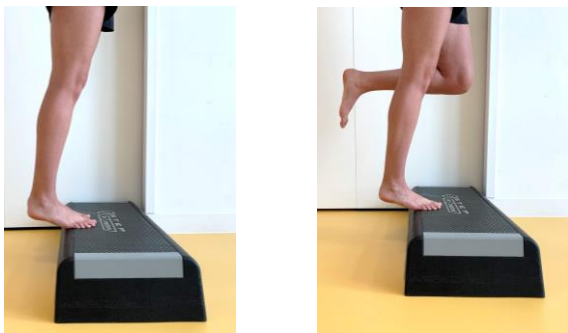


- **Sit in a chair with your feet resting on the floor.**
 - **Place a weight on your knees. You can use a rucksack with books or bottles of water inside.**
1. Start with your heel on the ground.
 2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
 3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat ___ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again ___ times.

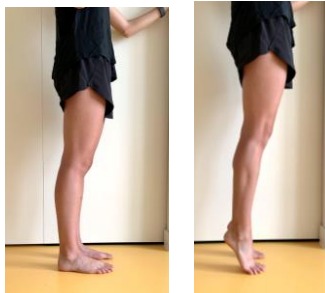
Exercise 2: Static hold off a step



- **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.

Strengthening with the knee straight

Exercise 3: Raise both heels with the knee straight

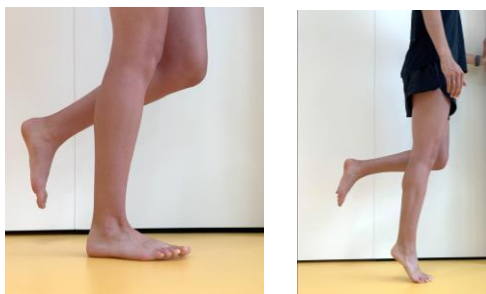


- **Stand with your heels on the ground.**
1. Start with your heels on the ground.
 2. Raise your heels up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
 3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat ___ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again ___ times.

Exercise 4: Raise one heel with the knee straight



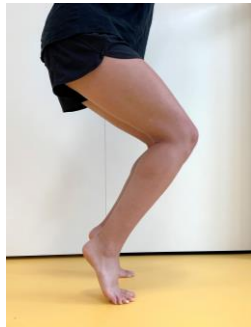
- **Stand on one leg with your knee straight.**
1. Start with your heel on the ground.
 2. Raise your heel up as far as you can moving slowly (3 seconds to lift up)
 3. Hold at the top for 2 seconds, and then lower back down slowly for 3 seconds.

Repeat ___ times.

Rest for 1 minute and then do this again ___ times.

Strengthening with the knee bent

Exercise 5: Raise both heels with the knee bent



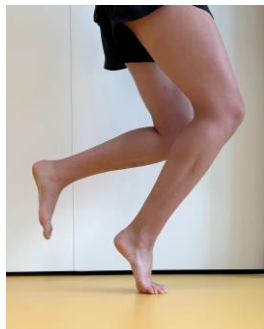
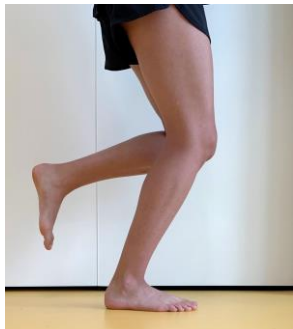
- **Stand with your heels on the ground and knees slightly bent.**

1. Start with your heels on the ground.
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 on one leg with your heel on the ground.**

1. Start with your heel on the ground.
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.

Strength for sport and exercise

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.

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

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 or telephone 01225 825656/ 826319.