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Achilles tendinopathy

The Achilles tendon

The Achilles tendon is one of the largest and strongest tendons in the body. It attaches the muscles that point your foot downwards (Soleus and Gastrocnemius) to the back of your heel bone (calcaneus). It is important in the function of the foot to propel you forwards during walking and running.

What is Achilles tendinopathy?

Achilles Tendinopathy is a common condition that happens when the Achilles tendon becomes painful. This can happen for many different reasons but the main ones are tendon degeneration and tendon overload. Common symptoms include:

- Pain perceived to be in the tendon
- Stiffness when moving after periods of inactivity
- Point tenderness in the tendon or where it attaches onto the heel bone
- Swelling/bulbous thickening of the tendon

Causes

- Tight muscles around the ankle
- Stiff joints around the ankle
- Certain foot shapes make it more common – either high arched or low arched
- Sudden changes or increases in activity levels
- Weakness in the muscles that point the foot downwards

- Health related issues associated with Achilles Tendinopathy such as: obesity, hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, diabetes and sero-negative arthropathies

Treatment

- Activity modification – you must initially reduce whatever activity causes your symptoms to worsen
- You can use simple pain killers that may help manage your symptoms
- Supportive and cushioned footwear
- Orthotics to support the shape of your foot
- A heel pad may help if your pain is on the back of the heel
- Night splints can also be used as an adjunct to therapy to help with symptom management if morning stiffness is a distinct problem
- Foot wear - heel raise/ heel lift
- Stretches to lengthen the calf muscles

- Exercises to strengthen the calf muscles, your Physiotherapist will advise you on which exercises to do and when.

Stretches Aim for 2 x daily exercises 3 sets of ≈ 15 reps

Exercises

Massage can be helpful before and after exercises and stretches.