

Management of your heel pain (Achilles tendinitis) Important Things You Need To Know

Non insertional Achilles tendinitis causes pain and swelling in the area at the back of the heel where the Achilles tendon meets the heel bone. It is often associated with an increase in activity level and tends to occur in patients in their 30's and 40's. Treatment is usually non-operative and includes an initial period where the symptoms are allowed to settle followed by a gradual return to activity.

What can I do for myself?

You should use as many of these treatments as possible concurrently:

- Footwear modification
 - Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes with a slight heel or heel lift inside.
 - Avoid shoes with a heel height of lower than the forefoot
 - Avoid bare feet
- Modify your activities (avoid activities that load the Achilles, e.g. new training programmes, new shoes).
- Lose weight
- Massage and Ice
 - Use ice on the painful area for 15-20 minutes, at least 2-3 times per day - especially in the evening.
 - Option A – Fill a styrofoam or paper cup with water and freeze it. Peel back the leading edge of the cup before application. Massage the affected area for 15-20 minutes.
 - Option B – Rest the affected area on an ice pack for 15-20 minutes. **CAUTION: Avoid using ice with circulation or sensation problems.**
- Strengthening and stretching your Achilles and calf ****this is the most important intervention****
Do your “**heel drop**” exercises 3 sets of 15 repetitions twice daily for 12 weeks. These exercises can be viewed on YouTube here (“Eccentric calf muscle exercises” – there are 4 videos, parts 1 to 4):
<http://www.youtube.com/user/JFootAnkleRes#p/u/5/M6EKuuZ7C2E>
 - Always warm up first to minimise excessive pressure on the Achilles, e.g. get your blood flowing on an exercise bike for 5-10 minutes before starting these exercises.
 - Stand on your toes at the edge of a ledge such as a stair.
 - Slowly lower your heels down below the ledge, stretching and straightening the Achilles tendon.
 - This can be done with both legs at a time or for a more concentrated effort, one at a time. It can also be done with the knees straight or with the knees bent (each method puts extra force on a different muscle in the lower leg)
 - These exercises must be painful to be effective, continue the exercise even if you experience pain. When you do not experience pain during the exercises, do them while wearing a backpack with 5 kilograms of weight, increasing the weight as needed to feel pain.



Do your “**calf stretching**” exercises for 30-60 seconds on each leg at least two times per day.

- Stand an arm’s length away from the wall, facing the wall. Lean into the wall, stepping forward with one leg, leaving the other leg planted back. The leg remaining back is the one being stretched.
- The leg being stretched should have the knee straight (locked) and the toes pointed straight at the wall.
- Stretch forward until tightness is felt in the calf.
- Hold this position without bouncing for a count of 30-60 seconds



Do your “**double leg heel raises**” exercises starting with 5 sets of 5 repetitions and increasing slowly over a period of weeks to 10-15 sets of 15 repetitions.

- Stand near a wall or chair for support
- Standing with feet shoulder width apart rise up onto the tips of your toes, pause briefly then return to starting position
- Repeat
- Use an oral anti-inflammatory medication
 - Take these medicines as prescribed by your GP or purchase these from a pharmacy.
- See your doctor when your pain has failed to respond to the above regimen after three months of application