

Reactive Achilles Tendinopathy (Acute onset)

Over the past few years research into tendon problems has improved our understanding of the conditions. The term “tendinopathy” has replaced the term tendonitis.

A reactive tendinopathy is a non-inflammatory, short-term response where the tendon thickens and stiffens in an attempt to reduce the stresses that are being placed upon it.

About reactive tendinopathy

Causes

Reactive tendinopathy can occur after a sudden increase in physical activity, a change in activity levels or a burst of new activity which results in acute tendon overload. Another possible cause is a direct blow to the tendon. This type of tendinopathy is more common in younger people.

Symptoms

Patients commonly report pain or stiffness at the back of the ankle over the achilles tendon particularly in the morning, when walking after prolonged sitting or during the first part of a run or walk.

Treatment

The key principle is to reduce the overloading of the tendon.

Symptoms can reduce and the tendon can return to its normal state by resting or reducing the activity that has caused the problem. Some people find that the use of a heel raise in the early stages can also be of benefit to the tendon.

It may take several weeks for the initial pain to settle. The tendon will still be sensitive to high loads at this stage and training needs to be gradually increased to prevent reoccurrence. If you wish to continue exercising, cycling has minimal impact and is less likely to worsen your symptoms.

Exercises

The following exercises should be completed to help improve tendon strength.

They should not aggravate your pain or symptoms. If they do then go back a stage. Avoid stretching as this can increase compression of the tendon and delay the settling of your symptoms. These exercises are designed as a progressive programme and should not all be completed at the initial stage of your symptoms.

1. Isometric mid range strengthening exercises

Stand with both feet on the floor. Hold onto support as needed for balance. Gently push up onto your tiptoes and hold the position for 10 seconds. Do not push up as high as you can but hold yourself in the mid position from the floor and your full range.

Repeat this 10 times, two to three times a day. (If this is too painful you can do the same exercise whilst sat in a chair).

2. Double heel raises

Repeat the exercise as above without holding at the midpoint. Work up as high as is comfortable and then gently return your heel down to the floor. Repeat this 10-15 times, two to three times a day. (If this is painful then go back to stage 1).

3. Single heel raises

Stand on one foot holding onto support as needed. Gently push up onto your tiptoes. Repeat this 10-15 times, two to three times a day. (If this is painful then go back to stage 2).

Once single heel raising has become easier, a graded return and increase in exercise levels needs to occur. You should take time to gently build back in your specific activity whether that is walking, running or sports.

If you rush back into higher level activities again you may have a reoccurrence of your symptoms.



You will need to reduce the aggravating activities to give the tendon time to recover, otherwise you may develop a more chronic long-term condition.

There are many types of tendon pain and each has its own treatment options that are specific to you. If the advice here aggravates your symptoms or they do not improve then speak to your GP who can refer you to a physiotherapist. It can take up to several months for your pain to fully settle and to return to your normal activity levels

How to contact us

Visit our webpage berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

East Berkshire: Windsor, Maidenhead, Slough, Ascot, Bracknell

Call [0300 365 5678](tel:03003655678)

Email mskphysioadmin@berkshire.nhs.uk

West Berkshire: Wokingham, Newbury, Reading

Call [0118 9041 777](tel:01189041777)

Email admin.rdgphysio@berkshire.nhs.uk

