

Achilles Tendon Pain (Achilles Tendonitis)

What is Achilles tendinosis/tendinitis?

The Achilles Tendon connects the calf muscles to the foot. Achilles tendinosis is a degenerative (related to wear and tear) condition that occurs where the Achilles tendon attaches to the heel bone (Insertional Achilles tendonitis) or 3 to 5 cm above the attachment (Non-insertional tendonitis). Inflammation at the site of insertion may be associated with bony enlargement which is called Haglund bump/lump

What are the presenting features?

- A noticeable bump on the back of heel.
- Pain in Achilles tendon.
- Swelling/redness in the back of the heel (Insertional Achilles tendonitis)
- Swelling of the Achilles 3 to 5 cm above its attachment to heel bone (Non-insertional tendonitis)
- Patients also frequently complain of the bump rubbing on footwear

What treatments are available?

First line of treatment is non-operative.

- Activity modification
- Pain relief medications
- Heel gel/lift
- Physiotherapy
- Extra corporeal shock wave therapy (ESWT)
- Steroid injections (Has a small risk of tendon rupture)
- Operation

What is shockwave therapy?

In this high energy acoustic waves is applied to painful area. You will feel as if the head of the machine is “punching” the Achilles tendon. It brings about pain relief by promoting repair/regeneration. It is a non-invasive procedure and does not involve anaesthesia. Routinely 3 to 5 sessions are needed and each session lasts 15 to 30 minutes.

What does the operation involve?

Operation is performed a day case procedure. Operation is usually performed under general anaesthesia. Surgery involves removing the damaged portion of the Achilles tendon.

In cases where the damage is extensive, the entire Achilles tendon may need to be removed and tendon transfer using the tendon to big toe may become necessary.

How long does recovery take? / What happens after surgery?

Most patients go home the same day. Removable stitches will be placed on the skin cut. You will have a plaster splint and will not be allowed to weight bear for 2-4 weeks. The plaster splint and stitches will be removed in about 2 weeks after the operation. At this stage you will be given a walker boot for further 2-4 weeks. Patients are allowed to weight bear as able in the boot. Return to sports takes 3 to 6 months from the time of the operation

Swelling is quite common after surgery and elevating the leg at regular intervals will help in reducing the swelling.

When can I start driving after the operation?

Patients having had the left ankle operated on will be able to drive an automatic car within two weeks. Those who have had an operation on the right side will be advised not to drive for about 6-8 weeks. You are advised not to fly after surgery for about six weeks.

When can I go back to work?

This will depend on the type of work you do. If you have a desk job, you should be able to return to work 2-4 weeks after surgery. Manual workers may need up to 6-12 weeks off work.

What are the complications of operation?

- Infection
- Nerve injury (causing numbness around scar or foot)
- Stiffness & swelling
- Clots
- Wound problems
- Ongoing pain (including complex regional pain syndrome)
- Failure of the repair, rupture and revision surgery

