

My Achilles tendon has swollen up, how should I manage it?

Swelling in the Achilles tendon is caused by overuse or trauma. Constant stress placed on the Achilles tendon causes irritation, inflammation and pain.

There are several factors that can lead to inflammation of the Achilles tendon:

- Overtraining, tiredness, stress
- Poor running technique (biomechanics)
- Poor muscle strength (core stability)
- Poor balance (proprioception)
- Poor flexibility
- Poor footwear
- Running on hard surfaces
- Running on a cambered road

If you notice swelling in your Achilles tendon, the initial treatment is POLICE – Prevent further damage, Optimal Loading, Ice, Compression, Elevation.

Preventing Further Damage

If your Achilles tendon is injured then the first thing to do is minimize the amount of further damage you do. The easiest way to do this is to stop or minimize any activities that cause your Achilles to swell up or get sore. Your Chartered Physiotherapist is fully qualified to determine the extent of the damage in your Achilles tendon and advise you on the appropriate management strategy to adopt.

An Achilles tendon injury can vary from complete rupture to a low grade inflammation. If you continue to run on an inflamed and injured Achilles tendon, you may put yourself at greater risk of an Achilles rupture. A complete rupture will require either surgery, a period of immobilization in a cast or a combination of both.

Optimal Loading

Seek advice from your Physiotherapist on what optimal loading for your Achilles is. This may vary from complete rest on crutches to continuing on with training in a pain free way, such as cycling, swimming, stretching and strength work.



Ice, Compression, Elevation

Inflammation can be reduced by icing, compressing and elevating the injured Achilles. Apply ice for 20 minutes every 2-3 hours during the initial phase. Ensure you use a towel or sheet placed in between the icepack and your skin to prevent ice-burns.

Your Chartered Physiotherapist can also use a combination of massage, taping, dry needling and exercise to decrease inflammation and improve recovery time from injury.

Rehabilitation Back to Full Training

Achilles tendon injuries are notoriously slow to heal and have a very high re-injury rate. Once your swelling has subsided and there is no pain on walking, your physiotherapist will commence you on a rehabilitation programme to get you back to full training. Rehabilitation programmes consist of exercises to improve your leg and back flexibility and strength. These exercises will also help improve your running technique (biomechanics) and balance (proprioception) and are essential in decreasing the chances of further injury.



A physiotherapist can also assess your foot biomechanics and may also suggest changes in your footwear or temporary or permanent orthotics to decrease the work load on the Achilles tendon.