

Orthopaedic Connection

Repair of Achilles Tendon

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Two weeks ago Achilles Tendon Injury was the topic. This week I will finish the discussion with how I treat a tendon that has been injured.

First let's cover tendinitis.

Achilles Tendinitis

The treatment is almost never surgical so you can relax on this one! There are many things that we mix and match.

- Achilles stretching program suggested for you by a physical therapist.
- Change of shoe wear
- Advil or similar nonsteroidal medication
- If a runner, decrease mileage
- A heel lift of 1/4 - 1/2 inch inside your shoe
- Local massage
- Formal physical therapy including ultrasound
- Four to six week period of a walking cast or air cast walking brace
- Cortisone injection. *Not!!* It can cause rupture of the tendon. I never use it.

Achilles Tendon Rupture or Tear

In rare cases an Achilles tendon rupture or tear can be managed in a cast with the toe pointed downward. No weight on the foot and it would take at least eight to twelve weeks in the cast to heal. Surgery might not be done if the person's medical condition prevented surgery. Another example would be if I felt the tendon was only partly ruptured and could heal on its own. In reality, this is hardly ever the case as determined by exam.

Surgery to Repair the Achilles Tendon

If I determine the Achilles tendon is completely ruptured I try to do the repair as soon as I can because the tissues begin to change and get swollen and actually kind of "mushy". The longer the delay the harder it is to repair.

The Repair

Almost all the Achilles tendon tears I have operated on look like two mop ends. Completely torn in two, retracted and "stringy". I have to piece it back together somehow and repair it with strong suture material to hold the ends together.

Recovery

After surgery I place the patient in a cast with the foot pointed down. No weight on the foot in my patients for six weeks. At the six week point I change the cast and bring the foot up in the next cast. I permit partial weight in this cast for a month. After that I put the patient in an air cast walking brace. How long the person is in a brace depends on several factors related to age, quality of repair, person's activity, etc.

The Good News

In all the Achilles tendons I have repaired there have only been 2 that have return after they have healed. There are not many surgical procedures that are done that achieve that level of success.

Additional information about Achilles Tendon can be obtained by checking out the office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

It contains a huge amount of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital. See you next week.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush