

Repair of Achilles Tendon Injuries

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Today is a milestone you might say. This is the 100th article I have written for Lakeview Area News and have never missed a week since our beginning in February 2007.

That is a ton of information, but what I am most excited about is what I said a couple of weeks ago. Every single article, every word will soon be easily found on our office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com. There will be an index of all the articles I have written for Lakeview Area News. If you look at it and want to see what I wrote about Total knee, for example, it will be instantly and easily available. So none of the information will ever be lost!

Now to continue with the Achilles tendon. 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.

The Orthopaedic Clinic at Lakeview Community Wellness Center is there for you. It is our continued commitment to LCWC and to all of you.

All Orthopaedic problems can be evaluated at LCWC or at the office in Alma, 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan. Please call 989-463-6092 to schedule an appointment at either location. Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center dates are January 8, January 15, and January 29, 2010.

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

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

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush