

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

The Stubborn Achilles Tendon

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

When conservative treatment has not helped, as I spoke about last week, I need to go in another direction.

Some Achilles tendons don't want to behave. They insist on continuing to hurt! Fortunately these "bad boy" Achilles tendons are few in number.

Why?

Appropriate self care will usually reverse the initial painful inflammatory phase which medically is termed Achilles tendinitis.

If the tendinitis did not respond, it usually means that the tendon has started to undergo certain chronic changes instead of healing.

These changes are termed tendinosis.

What's That?

Tendinosis can develop over weeks or months. The tendon can develop tearing of its fibers called microtears. This results in pain, swelling, feeling of stiffness and limping. The calf feels weak. You can't imagine running.

The tearing of the tendon tissue causes the tendon to enlarge or swell. Visible thickening is usually noted.

Trouble Ahead

Weakened Achilles tendon tissues are at risk to partially or completely rupture or as it is popular to say "blow out". If the Achilles tendon completely ruptures, I always feel a better result can be obtained by surgically repairing it. If you have these symptoms short of a complete rupture, please don't run or jump. Get a 3/8 to 1/2 inch felt lift to put in the heel of your good supporting shoe.

Treatment

If the things I have already told you don't help, they have not been helpful enough in your case to trigger healing.

You will need to see a Physical Therapist to start a special type of exercise strengthening called *eccentric strength training*. It can help reverse Achilles degeneration and microtears.

This really needs to be taught and supervised by a Physical Therapist. It can harm you if not done correctly.

What Else?

Well, there is a lot really.

- Medications applied to the skin over the tendon (Nitroglycerin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory meds)
- Oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications
- Steroid injections (sometimes)

- Inject platelet rich plasma
- Ultrasound therapy
- Needling the tendon to initiate healing
- Surgery rarely as a last resort

As I hope you can see this Achilles problem can get complicated. If more simple measures don't help, you really need Orthopaedic Surgery evaluation and treatment.

Our goal is quality, highest standards and best outcomes.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every Argus article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush