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Tendinitis

What is Tendinitis?

Tendinitis is the inflammation of a tendon. Tendons are thick cords of tissue that connect muscles to bone.

Achilles tendinitis, or an inflammation of the Achilles tendon, is one of the most common causes of foot or ankle pain.

Other types of foot/ankle tendinitis include posterior tibial tendinitis and peroneal tendinitis.

Causes

Tendinitis can result from an injury or over-use. Improper stretching prior to exertion or incorrect form during physical activity can also contribute to the development of tendinitis. Some people, including those with “flat feet,” tight tendons or arthritis, are particularly prone to tendinitis.

Symptoms

Pain is the most prominent symptom of tendinitis. The pain will be most noticeable when you try to move that part of your body. The involved tendon may swell.

Home Care

Rest and ice can ease the pain of tendinitis. Stay off your foot or ankle as much as possible and apply ice for up to 15 minutes at a time, three to four times a day.

When to Visit a Podiatrist

If the pain doesn't go away with ice and rest, or if the pain persists beyond a week, it's time to see a podiatrist. Don't wait! Tendinitis can become a chronic problem, and it's a lot harder to treat chronic problems than acute injuries.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Your podiatrist will ask you some questions about your pain and general health and perform a complete physical examination of your feet and ankles. X-rays or an MRI might be ordered to rule out any other problems, such as a fracture or torn tendon.

Treatment will focus on relieving the pain and preventing further injury. Your podiatrist may create shoe inserts or a soft cast to effectively immobilize the affected area for a period of time. (Often, a couple of weeks are needed for the tendon to heal.) Medication can help too. Your podiatrist may recommend or prescribe oral medication.

Prevention

Your podiatrist will work with you to decrease your chances of re-developing tendinitis. He or she may create custom orthotics to help control the motion of your feet. He or she may also recommend certain stretches or exercises to increase the tendon's elasticity and strengthen the muscles attached to the tendon.

Gradually increasing your activity level with an appropriate training schedule—building up to a 5K run, for instance, instead of simply tackling the whole course the first day—can also help prevent tendinitis.