

Tendonitis

Tendons are bands of strong connective tissue that attach muscle to bone. Tendonitis is inflammation of a tendon. The symptoms include pain and swelling. Tendonitis is usually a type of overuse injury; the tendon is repeatedly strained until tiny tears form. Sites that are prone to tendonitis include the shoulder, wrist, knee, shin and heel. The symptoms of tendonitis can be similar to those of other conditions, such as arthritis or infection, so it is important to seek medical advice if your symptoms don't improve despite home care.

Symptoms

The symptoms of tendonitis can include:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Stiffness and restricted mobility at the affected joint
- Muscle weakness
- The skin over the affected area may feel warm to the touch.

Common causes

Some of the common causes of tendonitis can include:

- Overuse of the tendons by repetitive actions.
- Calcium deposit along the tendon at the site of insertion.
- Bone spurs on the heels.
- Any sporting activity that requires lots of jumping and running.
- Running on hard surfaces.
- Poor sporting technique, such as holding a tennis racquet or golf club incorrectly.
- Inappropriate sporting equipment, such as a tennis racquet that's too heavy.
- Lifting weights that are too heavy.
- Lifting heavy weights without warming up properly.
- Neglecting to warm up properly prior to sport or exercise.
- Extreme and regular physical effort, such as an intensive sports training schedule.
- Not taking enough time between training sessions to allow full recovery.
- Exercising in cold temperatures.
- Awkward positions that are maintained for a long time.
- Being obese, which puts excessive pressure on the tendons of the legs.

Self-care suggestions

Ways to manage mild cases of tendonitis at home include:

- Stop whatever activity triggered the pain.
- Rest the area - trying to 'work through' the pain will only make your symptoms worse and delay healing.
- Regularly apply ice packs (in the first few days) to the affected area to help reduce swelling and pain.

Seek medical advice

Severe or persistent tendonitis should be investigated by your doctor. You may need professional medical care that includes prescription drugs, or else your symptoms may be caused by conditions other than tendonitis. For example, you may be suffering from arthritis, bursitis, infection or a fracture. Generally speaking, if your symptoms haven't improved after one or two weeks of home treatment, or if the pain is severe or debilitating, see your doctor. Most cases of tendonitis recover completely; however, severe untreated tendonitis can lead to rupture of the tendon.

Diagnosis methods

Your doctor may use a variety of tests to diagnose tendonitis, including:

- Medical history
- Physical examination
- X-rays.

Treatment options

Treatment options for tendonitis may include:

- Strengthening exercises
- Stretching exercises
- Weight loss advice, if necessary
- The use of padding, splints or slings to help immobilise the affected joint
- Corticosteroid injections
- Ultrasound treatment
- In severe cases, surgery may be needed to repair the tendon.

Risk reduction strategies

Suggestions to reduce the risk of tendonitis include:

- Lose excess body fat, if necessary.
- Make sure to thoroughly warm up and cool down before and after exercising.
- Include slow, sustained stretches in your exercise routine.
- Make sure you maintain good form when participating in your chosen sport or exercise and resist the urge to push yourself too far too fast.
- Reduce the risk of overtraining by participating in a range of exercises and sports, not just one or two.
- Wear footwear appropriate to your sport.
- Strain on tendons caused by bowed legs or flat feet (for example) can be eased with the use of professionally fitted shoe inserts (orthoses) - see your podiatrist for further information and advice.
- Rearrange your workstation or daily work schedule to avoid long periods of the same manual activity (such as typing on a keyboard or using a hammer).

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Podiatrist
- Physiotherapist

Things to remember

- Tendons are bands of strong connective tissue that attach muscle to bone.
- Tendonitis is inflammation of a tendon; the symptoms include pain and swelling.
- Common sites include the shoulder, wrist, knee, shin and heel.
- Rest the area completely for at least two weeks. Don't 'work through' the pain - it will only make your symptoms worse and delay healing.
- Severe or persistent tendonitis should be investigated by your doctor.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Rheumatology Association (Vic Branch)

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