

# All About Achilles

The Achilles tendon is the strongest tendon in the body, and it is located in one of the most overused and under-appreciated body parts -- the foot. Because the foot is subjected to great amounts of stress every day (while running the pressure on each foot can be four times normal body weight), it is prone to injuries.

The Achilles tendon is a thick, cord-like structure that inserts into the back of the heel bone; the tendons attach muscle to the heel bone. A common Achilles injury is tendinitis, a condition that can significantly limit your participation in sports. Achilles tendinitis is an inflammation of the tendon. Symptoms usually include a burning pain or tenderness in the area two inches above the heel bone.

There are many causes of Achilles tendinitis but the most common are training errors, calf muscle inflexibility, and biomechanical abnormalities. Training errors include increasing your workout intensity too suddenly or changing your running terrain too abruptly. Inflexibility of the calf muscles can result from improper or inadequate stretching. This inflexibility can also be due to wearing high-heeled shoes that tend to shorten the tendon.

The Achilles tendon has a relatively poor blood supply, and this accounts for the longer time these injuries often take to heal. Early treatment is necessary to prevent chronic injury. Initially, you should reduce or stop your sports activities for a period of time, and ice the back of your Achilles three times a day for 15 minutes. Using heel cups can help take the stress off the tendon, but be sure to place them in both shoes or you may develop an imbalance that can lead to other injuries.

While Achilles tendinitis can be slow to heal, if your pain lingers for more than two weeks seek the care of a podiatric physician for a more thorough evaluation. For more information on Achilles tendinitis and general foot health visit [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org) or call 1-800-FOOTCARE.



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