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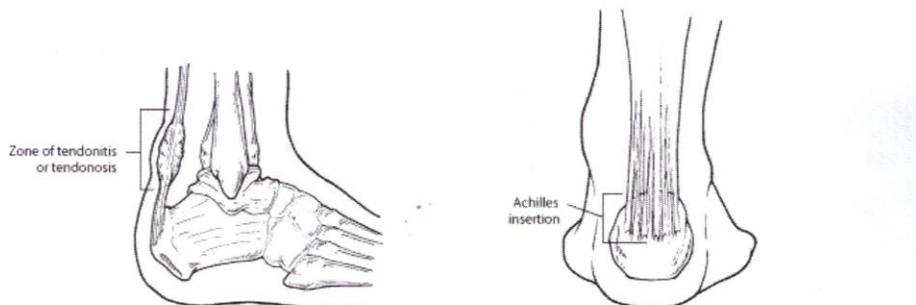
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## **Achilles Tendon Disorders**

**What is the Achilles Tendon?** A tendon is a band of tissue that connects a muscle to a bone. The Achilles tendon—the longest tendon in the body—runs down the back of the lower leg and connects the calf muscle to the heel bone. Also called the “heel cord,” the Achilles tendon facilitates walking by helping to raise the heel off the ground.

**Achilles Tendonitis and Achilles Tendonosis** Two common disorders that occur in the heel cord are Achilles tendonitis and Achilles tendonosis. Achilles tendonitis is an inflammation of the Achilles tendon. This inflammation is typically short-lived. Over time the condition usually progresses to a degeneration of the tendon (Achilles tendonosis), in which the tendon loses its organized structure and is likely to develop microscopic tears. Sometimes the degeneration involves the site where the Achilles tendon attaches to the heel bone. In rare cases, chronic degeneration with or without pain may result in rupture of the tendon.



**Causes** As “overuse” disorders, Achilles tendonitis and tendonosis are usually caused by a sudden increase of a repetitive activity involving the Achilles tendon. Such activity puts too much stress on the tendon too quickly, leading to micro-injury of the tendon fibers. Due to this ongoing stress on the tendon, the body is unable to repair the injured tissue. The structure of the tendon is then altered, resulting in continued pain.

In addition, people with excessive pronation (flattening of the arch) have a tendency to develop Achilles tendonitis and tendonosis due to the greater demands placed on the tendon when walking. If these individuals wear shoes without adequate stability, their over-pronation could further aggravate the Achilles tendon.

## Treatment

**Immobilization.** Immobilization may involve the use of a cast or removable walking boot to reduce forces through the Achilles tendon and promote healing.

**Ice.** To reduce swelling due to inflammation, apply a bag of ice over a thin towel to the affected area for 20 minutes of each waking hour. Do not put ice directly against the skin.

**Oral medications.** Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may be helpful in reducing the pain and inflammation in the early stage of the condition.

**Physical therapy.** Physical therapy may include strengthening exercises, soft-tissue massage/mobilization, gait and running re-education, stretching and ultrasound therapy.

*If non-surgical approaches fail to restore the tendon to its normal condition, surgery may be necessary. Our doctors will select the best procedure to repair the tendon.*

