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What is: Achilles Tendonitis

Definition

The Achilles is the largest tendon in the human body. Achilles tendonitis is an inflammation of the Achilles tendon and can be triggered by a variety of reason including rapidly increasing your running mileage or speed, adding hill running or stair climbing to your training routine, starting up too quickly after a layoff, trauma caused by sudden or hard contraction of the calf muscles when putting out extra effort such as in a final sprint, and/or overuse resulting from the natural lack of flexibility in the calf muscles.

Since the Achilles tendon does not have good blood supply or cell activity, this injury can be slow to heal. When an injury occurs to the tendon, cells from surrounding structures migrate into the tendon to assist in repair. Some of these cells come from blood vessels that enter the tendon to provide direct blood flow to increase healing. With the blood vessels come nerve fibers, which researchers believe could be the cause of the pain.

Symptoms

Symptoms of Achilles tendonitis can fall into a common pattern including:

- Mild pain after exercise or running that gradually worsens
- A noticeable sense of sluggishness in your leg
- Episodes of localized pain, sometimes severe, along the tendon during or a few hours after running
- Morning tenderness about an inch and a half above the point where the Achilles tendon is attached to the heel bone
- Stiffness that generally diminishes as the tendon warms up with use
- Some swelling

Treatments

Treatments available include icing the tendon 3-4 times daily for 15-20 minutes per session, resting the tendon by total withdrawal from running or exercising for a week or switching to other cross-training methods such as swimming that does not stress the Achilles tendon, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin or ibuprofen, stretching, massage, ultrasound and appropriate exercises to strengthen the weak muscle group in front of the leg and the upward foot flexors. If the injury still continues or worsens, it is important to see a physical therapist or podiatrist as soon as possible because this injury can lead to an Achilles tendon rupture with continued overuse.

Sources

www.orthoinfo.aaos.org. 2007. American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.
www.wikipedia.org. 2007. Wikipedia.