

# Achilles Tendon Rupture Treatment Guidelines Handout

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**What is an Achilles tendon tear?** An Achilles tendon tear, also known as an Achilles tendon rupture, is a complete or partial tear of the tendon connecting the calf muscles to the heel bone. It commonly occurs during sports or recreational activities that involve sudden jumping, pivoting, or sprinting movements.

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**Symptoms include:** Sudden, severe pain in the back of the ankle or calf, often described as feeling like being kicked or stabbed  
A popping or snapping sound at the time of injury  
Swelling and bruising near the heel  
Difficulty walking properly or inability to bear weight on the injured leg  
Inability to stand on the toes of the injured leg  
Inability to bend the foot downward or push off the injured leg when walking  
A palpable gap or defect in the tendon, suggesting it has completely torn  
Weakness or stiffness in the Achilles tendon area  
Pain that subsides into a dull ache after the initial acute injury

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**How to manage and treat an Achilles tendon tear**  
**Rest and immobilization** Avoid putting weight on the injured leg. Use crutches to assist with walking. Wear a cast or walking boot to keep the ankle from moving and allow the torn tendon to heal.  
**Ice and elevation** Apply ice to the injured area for 15-20 minutes every few hours to reduce pain and swelling. Elevate the foot and ankle above the level of the heart as much as possible.

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**Pain medication** Take over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed. Follow your doctor's instructions if prescribed stronger pain medication.  
**Physical therapy** Begin physical therapy once cleared by your doctor, typically a few weeks after injury. Perform exercises to improve strength and flexibility of the calf muscles and Achilles tendon. Gradually return to normal activities under the guidance of your physical therapist.  
**Surgery** In some cases, surgery may be recommended to repair the torn tendon. The surgeon will stitch the torn tendon back together and possibly reinforce it with other tendons. Surgery is often followed by immobilization in a cast and physical therapy.

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**Other tips:** Increase workout intensity and duration gradually, by no more than 10% per week. Wear proper shoes that fit well and provide adequate heel cushioning and arch support. Replace running shoes every 3 months. Cross-train with low-impact activities like swimming and cycling mixed in with high-impact sports. Warm up properly before exercising and cool down afterward. Choose softer running surfaces like trails or grass rather than concrete when possible. Stop activities that cause pain in your Achilles tendon area and rest to allow it to heal. Maintain a healthy weight and eat a nutritious diet. Stretch and strengthen your calf muscles regularly with exercises like calf raises.

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