

Lower leg tendinopathy

Community Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have been diagnosed with a condition called tendinopathy. It gives information on what this is, what causes it and how it is treated.

What is tendinopathy?

Tendinopathy is a condition that causes pain, swelling, stiffness and reduced function. It affects tendons which are soft tissue structures made of collagen that connect muscles to bone. The term tendinopathy is now widely used; however, you may also hear the term tendinitis used to describe the same problem.

Previously tendon pain was thought to be caused by inflammation; however, recent research has shown this not to be the case. We now know that tendinopathy is the result of failed healing which occurs after the tendon has been overloaded.

What causes tendinopathy?

Many different factors can contribute to the development of tendinopathy. The main risk factor for developing it is a sudden increase or decrease in activity, specifically activity that requires the tendon to store energy such as walking, running or jumping.

Other factors that increase the risks for developing tendinopathy include reduced muscle strength/endurance, increasing age, increased weight, menopause, elevated cholesterol, diabetes and increased susceptibility to pain. People with the above risk factors may develop tendon pain with only a small change in their activity levels.

How is it diagnosed?

The condition is usually diagnosed by asking about your symptoms and examining the affected area. Occasionally, scans such as ultrasound or MRI are used. However, changes visible with ultrasound or MRI scans do not relate to symptoms as these changes are common in people without pain.

Therefore, treatment is based on symptoms and function, rather than the findings from scans. The majority of patients with tendinopathy can be treated successfully without the need for further scans.

How is it treated?

- Modifying daily activities is important in settling tendon pain. In the short term this involves avoiding activities that make it worse.
- Tendinopathy does not improve with rest alone. A short period of relative rest may be required in some cases; however, rehabilitation is needed after rest to build up the load tolerance of the tendon.
- Passive treatments such as massage and ultrasound were commonly used in the past; however, tendinopathies rarely improve with these alone. **Appropriate exercise is often the most vital ingredient.**
- Exercise has been found to be the best treatment for tendinopathy. Tendons need to be loaded progressively so they can develop greater tolerance to the loads that are placed on them in their day to day life. In the vast majority of cases (but not all), tendinopathy will not improve without exercise.
- It is normal for tendinopathies to respond slowly to exercise. You need to have patience, ensure that exercise is performed consistently and try to avoid the temptation of short cuts like injections and surgery. Unfortunately, there are often no short cuts with this condition.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation helps to restore someone to health or normal life through training and therapy. Your rehabilitation will be split into three stages, and progression between the stages will be guided by your physiotherapist.

Stage 1

The aim of this stage is to reduce pain. Specific types of exercise have been shown to have a pain-relieving effect. During this stage, it is also important to manage the load placed upon your tendon.

There may be certain activities that place more of a load on your tendon which should be minimised during this stage. These usually involve stretching or direct compression of the tendon.

Stage 2

The aim of this stage is to improve strength and the ability of the tendon to manage load. In isolation, walking or running is unlikely to improve tendon strength – instead, resistance exercise is required.

There are a number of options available depending on your pain, area of weakness and physical activity level. Your physiotherapist will guide you through this stage to find the best exercises for your condition, and how you should gradually progress these. To improve strength, it is important to be consistent with your exercise.

Stage 3

The aim of this stage is to continue strengthening muscles in ways which are gradually more challenging to the tendon. It is important to ensure your technique is slow and controlled when performing the exercises.

24 hour pattern

Progression of your rehabilitation will be guided by the 24 hour pattern of your symptoms. This is the pattern of pain 24 hours after performing exercise.

- If the pain settles back to the original level within 24 hours of performing exercise, rehabilitation should be continued or progressed.
- If the pain increases or does not settle back to the original level within 24 hours of performing, your rehabilitation programme may need to be adapted.

You can aid this process by performing the exercise identified by your physiotherapist and scoring your pain out of 10. Your physiotherapist will then guide you on how to adapt your rehabilitation programme.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Physiotherapy Service or Orthopaedic Assessment Service
Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre
Venture Way
Brierley Hill
DY5 1RU

Physiotherapy Service: 01384 321605 (8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Orthopaedic Assessment Service: 01384 321324 or 01384 321423 (8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Or your named physiotherapist or orthopaedic practitioner on.....

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/physiotherapy-community/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm să sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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