ACHILLES TENDON PAIN

A Physiotherapy Guide to Progressive Loading



🔹 INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this guide, you are probably experiencing pain in the back of your ankle, around the Achilles tendon, that is limiting your daily activities, walking, running, or participating in sports.

The first thing we want you to know is this:

👉 **You are not alone. Achilles tendon pain is one of the most common overuse injuries.**

You may have heard terms such as:

- Achilles tendinopathy
- Achilles tendinitis
- Achilles tendinosis

Although these terms have slightly different medical meanings, they are often used to describe the same condition: a tendon that has temporarily lost part of its ability to tolerate and adapt to load.

This rehabilitation protocol is designed to help people experiencing:

- Achilles tendon pain
- Achilles tendinopathy
- tendon overload
- pain while walking or running
- pain during or after physical activity

Although the condition can be painful and, in some cases, persistent, it is usually **not a serious injury**. Instead, it often reflects a tendon that needs to gradually rebuild its strength and tolerance to load.

This guide has been created to help you begin a **simple, progressive, and safe physiotherapy program**.

🔹 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The Achilles tendon is the strongest and largest tendon in the human body. Its primary role is to transfer the force generated by the calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus) to the foot during activities such as walking, running, jumping, and climbing stairs.

When the amount of load placed on the tendon exceeds its ability to adapt, it can become irritated and begin to produce symptoms such as:

- pain at the back of the ankle
- stiffness, especially in the morning
- discomfort while walking, running, or climbing stairs
- pain during or after physical activity

👉 **This does not necessarily mean that the tendon is damaged or torn.** In most cases, it simply means that the tendon needs to gradually rebuild its capacity to tolerate load through an appropriate exercise program.

🔹 AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT

One of the most common mistakes is:

❌ stopping all physical activity completely

❌ or continuing to train while ignoring the pain.

👉 The most effective approach combines:

- load management
- gradual progression
- specific exercises

This allows the tendon to gradually adapt, regain strength, and reduce pain over time.

🔹 HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

👉 **This is not just a random collection of exercises.**

It is a physiotherapy-based rehabilitation program designed to:

- reduce pain
- improve the tendon's load capacity
- restore strength and stability
- help you progressively return to your daily and sporting activities

Perform every exercise slowly, with control, and without forcing the movement.

💣 EXERCISES

🔹 FREQUENCY

Perform this program **2–3 times per week for approximately one month.**

- slow and controlled execution
- allow adequate recovery between sessions
- consistency is the key 🔑

🤔 WHAT YOU MAY FEEL

During the exercises, or even for a few hours afterwards, you may notice:

- mild discomfort
- a feeling of tightness
- muscle fatigue

👉 **This is usually completely normal.**

⚠️ If you experience **sharp, intense pain** or if your symptoms clearly worsen over the following days, reduce the load or make the exercise easier.

🔹 WHAT TO EXPECT

Recovery from Achilles tendinopathy is **rarely immediate**.

It requires:

- time
- repetition
- gradual progression

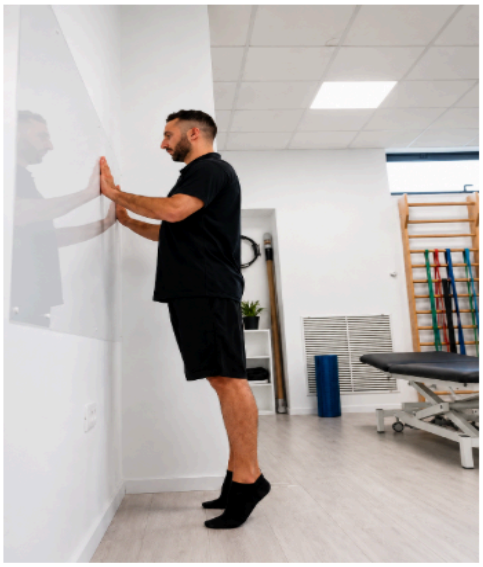
👉 With consistency, most people begin to notice a gradual reduction in pain during the first few weeks.

The initial goal is **not** to eliminate all discomfort immediately, but to achieve a steady improvement in both pain levels and your ability to perform everyday activities.

📈

👉 LET'S GET STARTED…

1️⃣ ACHILLES TENDON ISOMETRIC HOLD





Position

Stand upright, using a wall or a chair for support if needed. Raise your heels slightly while keeping your weight evenly distributed between both feet until you feel mild discomfort.

How to perform the exercise

Hold this position for **30–45 seconds**, maintaining your balance and keeping the discomfort at a tolerable level.

Sets

4–5 sets

Why is it important?

Isometric contractions can help reduce pain while preparing the tendon to gradually tolerate higher loads.

What should you notice?

Over the following days, it is common to notice a gradual reduction in pain and improved tolerance during daily activities.

2️⃣ ECCENTRIC ACHILLES TENDON MOBILISATION WITH A RESISTANCE BAND





What does "eccentric" mean?

The **eccentric phase** is the part of a movement where a muscle is working while it is lengthening.

In this exercise, the main goal is to **slowly control the return to the starting position**, allowing the Achilles tendon to receive a safe and progressive loading stimulus.

Position

Lie on your back with your leg fully extended.

Place a resistance band around the ball of your foot and hold both ends firmly with your hands to create light resistance.

How to perform the exercise

Start with your foot pulled towards you (**dorsiflexion**).

Then slowly point your toes away from you (**plantarflexion**) against the resistance of the band.

Finally, return slowly to the starting position over approximately **5 seconds**, keeping the entire movement controlled.

👉 **The slow return is the most important part of the exercise.**

👉 Keep the movement smooth and continuous, avoiding sudden or jerky motions.

Sets

2–3 sets of 10–12 repetitions

Why is it important?

This exercise provides a controlled way to begin loading the Achilles tendon, helping its fibres gradually adapt while improving the tendon's ability to tolerate greater demands during the later stages of rehabilitation.

3️⃣ PROGRESSIVE WEIGHT TRANSFER (BILATERAL → SINGLE-LEG)



Position

Stand with both feet flat on the floor. If necessary, use a wall or a chair for balance.

How to perform the exercise

From this position, smoothly transfer your weight following the natural sequence of foot loading:

heel → midfoot → forefoot

Then slowly reverse the movement:

forefoot → midfoot → heel

Keep the movement slow, controlled, and fluid, distributing your body weight evenly between both feet.

👉 During the **first two weeks**, perform the exercise using **both legs**.

👉 Once your pain has improved and the movement feels comfortable, progress to performing the same exercise using **only the affected leg**.

Sets

2–3 sets of 10–15 repetitions

Why is it important?

This exercise gradually restores the Achilles tendon's ability to tolerate load during everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs, and running. It also strengthens the calf muscles and prepares the tendon for more demanding exercises later in the rehabilitation process.

4️⃣ SINGLE-LEG BALANCE AND PROPRIOCEPTION

https://youtube.com/shorts/MgMLYP0fQUw

Position

Stand on your affected leg only. Keep a slight bend in your knee and find a stable position before starting the exercise.

How to perform the exercise

While maintaining your balance on the supporting leg, slowly move your other leg to draw a cross in the air.

Move your leg in the following four directions:

- forward
- backward
- right
- left

Return to the centre before moving in the next direction.

👉 Keep your trunk stable and avoid losing your balance.

👉 Perform each movement slowly and with control.

Sets

2–3 sets of 8–10 repetitions in each direction

Why is it important?

This exercise improves ankle proprioception and neuromuscular control while strengthening the deep stabilising muscles. It also enhances balance and stability during activities such as walking, running, and changing direction, helping to reduce the risk of future overload and supporting a more complete recovery of the Achilles tendon.

What should you notice?

With regular practice, you should notice improved balance on one leg, better movement control, and increased confidence during everyday and sporting activities.

5️⃣ CALF STRETCH WITH A RESISTANCE BAND



Position

Lie on your back with your leg fully extended.

Place a firm resistance band around the ball of your foot and hold both ends with your hands.

How to perform the exercise

Gently pull on the band, bringing your toes towards you until you feel a comfortable stretch in the back of your calf.

👉 Keep your knee fully extended throughout the exercise.

👉 Do not force the movement or stretch into sharp pain.

Hold the position for **30 seconds**, then slowly return to the starting position.

Sets

4–6 repetitions of 30 seconds

Why is it important?

This stretch helps improve the flexibility of the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles, reduces the feeling of stiffness, and promotes better ankle mobility. Improved flexibility allows the Achilles tendon to tolerate load in a more gradual and balanced way during everyday and sporting activities.

What should you notice?

You should feel a comfortable stretch in the back of your calf without experiencing intense pain. Over time, it is common to notice less stiffness and greater ease when moving your ankle and walking.

🔹 IMPORTANT NOTE

👉 It is normal for some exercises to cause mild discomfort during the exercise or for a few hours afterwards.

👉 The goal is **not** to avoid all discomfort, but to manage the load so that the tendon can gradually adapt.

👉 Avoid sudden increases in training volume, abrupt changes in intensity, or prolonged periods of complete rest, as these can delay recovery.

👉 **Patience and gradual progression are the keys to achieving a lasting recovery.**

🔹 FINAL MESSAGE

If you've made it this far, you've already taken an important first step:

👉 **You have started taking an active role in your Achilles tendon recovery.**

Remember:

- there is no need to rush
- there is no need to force the exercises
- your tendon needs time to adapt

👉 In most cases, following a gradual loading program and performing the exercises consistently will lead to a progressive improvement in your symptoms.

If, after approximately **one month**, you notice no improvement or your pain continues to worsen, it may be advisable to undergo a more comprehensive assessment to rule out other possible causes and adapt the treatment to your specific needs.

👉 We recommend consulting a **physiotherapist or another qualified healthcare professional.**

🚀 **Want to Keep Progressing?**

Continue with the Advanced Achilles Tendon Program, with a guided 4-week progression.

👉**DISCOVER THE ADVANCED PROGRAM :**
https://physiocarehub.eu/advanced-achilles-tendon-program/

🔹 SUPPORT

If you have any questions or need assistance:

📧 **support@physiocarehub.eu**

👉 **You don't have to go through this alone.**

We're here to help.

Antonio

