

The Achilles tendon is a large tendon which runs between the calf muscle and the heel. It controls movement of the foot up and down, and allows you to walk, run and stand on tip-toe.

How does it rupture?

The Achilles tendon is most commonly ruptured when the tendon is stressed e.g. when lunging. It is frequently ruptured during sports activity such as netball, squash, tennis and rugby. When the tendon ruptures you may hear a snap or crack. It may feel as though you have been hit or kicked in the back of the leg.

This is information on caring for your cast. **Read it carefully before leaving the Orthopaedic clinic** and ask the staff about anything you are unsure of.

Treatment

The treatment for most Achilles tendon ruptures is to immobilise the leg in a cast for 4 weeks and then swap the cast for an orthotic moon boot for a further 4 weeks. To ensure healing it is important not to put any weight onto your leg until you are told to do so. Walking may place additional stress through the tendon causing it to re-rupture.

For the first 2 weeks following your injury you will have your leg in a cast. You will have your foot pointing down to enable the 2 ends of the tendon to rejoin.

After 2 weeks you will return to the Orthopaedic clinic to have your cast changed and the tendon examined.

4 weeks post injury. Your cast will be removed and you will be placed into a moon boot with 3 heel wedges. You must wear the moon boot at all times and must not place any weight through your leg. You must wear the moon boot in bed. However it is now important to exercise. **3-4 times a day for 5mins you must remove your boot and gently flex your ankle up and down only.** You must not remove your boot to shower. Cover the moon boot with a large plastic bag (ensuring that the bag has

no holes). Secure the bag with tape e.g. masking tape or cello tape.

You will also be given a prescription to get a 'heel raise' applied to the heel of your shoes. Your heel raises should be applied to 2 pairs of shoes – work shoes and casual/dress shoes. There is no charge for this if your injury is covered by ACC.

6 weeks post injury. One heel wedge will be removed. You will be able to commence putting weight onto the leg. Continue with the exercises.

8 weeks post injury. You will be able to mobilise in a normal shoe using a heel raise for 4 weeks. You may be referred for physiotherapy and range-of-movement rehabilitation.

Operative treatment

In some cases an operation may be required to ensure your tendon heals. If it is felt this is necessary your doctor will discuss this with you.

Post surgery

For the first 2 weeks following your injury you will have your leg in a cast. You will have your foot pointing down.

After 2 weeks You will be placed into a moon boot with 3 heel wedges. You must wear this moon boot at all times and must not place any weight through your leg. You must wear the moon boot in bed. Do not remove your boot to shower. Cover the moon boot with a large plastic bag (ensuring that the bag has no holes). Secure the bag with tape e.g. masking tape or cello tape.

Commence exercises. Remove your moon boot and gently flex your ankle up and down only.

4 weeks post injury. One heel wedge will be removed. You will be able to commence putting weight onto the leg. Continue with the exercises

6 weeks post injury. One more heel wedge will be removed. You will be able to fully weight bear on the leg. Continue with the exercises.

8 weeks post injury. You will be able to mobilise in a normal shoe using a heel raise for 4 weeks. You

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may be referred to physiotherapy for calf strengthening and range-of-movement rehabilitation.

Exercises

Walking on a flat surface is the best exercise to strengthen your Achilles tendon. We recommend walking or swimming as it is important that you do not place too much stress on the tendon before it is completely healed.

Running, jumping and other sporting activity should be avoided until recommended by your doctor. This may be for a 3-6 month period.

Preventing re-rupture

There is an increased risk of re-rupturing your Achilles tendon in the 3-6 months following removal of your cast and moon boot. If your tendon re-ruptures you will probably need to have surgery.

Re-rupture following minor trauma can be difficult to detect. Often the symptoms are increased pain, swelling or redness (inflammation). If you have any of these symptoms you need to contact the Orthopaedic clinic.

You can help prevent re-rupture by:-

- Always using your heel raise in your shoes
- When walking up or down stairs, take one stair at a time, leading with the unaffected leg
- Take extreme care when on wet or slippery surfaces. Many re-ruptures occur through slipping on a wet bathroom floor
- When out walking take care when stepping off a curb or crossing a road. Use extreme care when walking up or down hills

Follow-up appointments

It is important that you return for your follow-up appointments. You will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment where your injury and progress will be reviewed. This will be followed up with several appointments before you are discharged from the clinic.

If you experience any of the following symptoms you should seek medical advice promptly:

Symptom	Possible causes
Redness, pain or discharge from the wound.	Infection or haematoma (blood clot).
Fever, chills or sweats.	Infection.
Pain, swelling or tenderness in your calves.	Blood clots forming in calf veins (DVT).
Sudden shortness of breath, catching chest pain while breathing, coughing up blood in your sputum.	Blood clots from calves travelling to lungs (PE).

Contact us:

Remember If you do not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (including Public Holidays) 8am -9.30pm.
Sat & Sunday 9am -5.30pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 4.30pm.

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Orthopaedic Clinic on (04) 385 5954. If they are closed contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department on (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.