

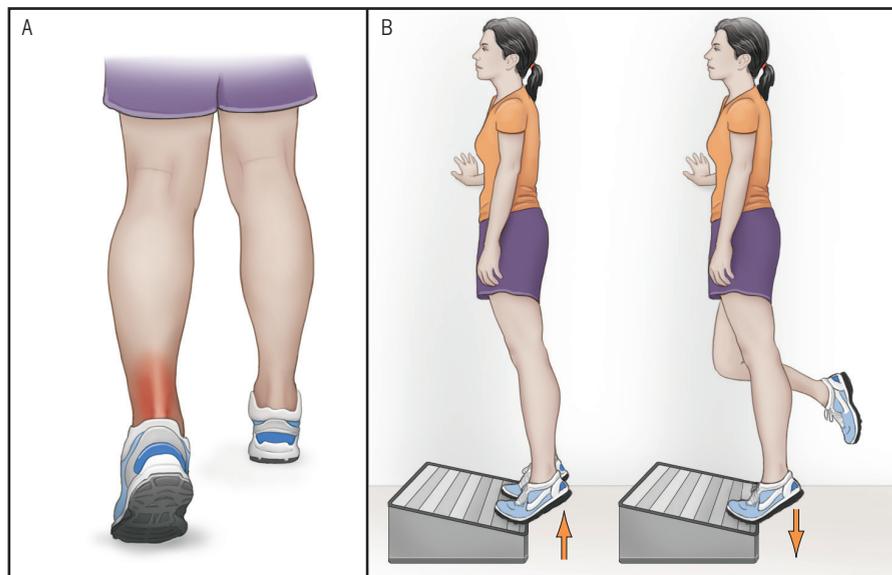
Optimizing Recovery After Achilles Tendon Pain

Guidelines Help Deliver Quality Care

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Achilles tendinopathy can temporarily stop many active people, and particularly those who participate in sports. Pain in the Achilles tendon often occurs in the middle of this fibrous tissue that connects the muscles at the back of the lower leg to the heel bone. This type of Achilles soreness or stiffness is common and usually results from an overuse injury. Physical therapists can help ensure that patients with Achilles tendinopathy receive the best quality care to optimize their recovery.

Guidelines published in the May 2018 issue of *JOSPT* recommend best practices from the published literature for evaluating, diagnosing, and treating Achilles tendon pain. These guidelines also suggest how physical therapists can determine when their patients are ready to return to activities after this injury. For patients, these guidelines outline the best rehabilitation treatment options based on scientific research. At the end of the day, optimal care is a combination of the leading science, the clinical expertise of your health care provider, and your input as the patient.



TREATING ACHILLES TENDINOPATHY. Pain in the middle of your Achilles tendon is a common overuse injury related to activity and sports (A). It is often successfully treated with strength training guided by a physical therapist. Strength training uses your body weight with or without additional weight to load the tendon and related muscles, as in the heel-raise exercise shown here, where the body is repeatedly raised using both legs and lowered using only the affected left leg (B). These exercises are done slowly; they can decrease pain, improve mobility, and help you return to your daily activities and sports.

This *JOSPT Perspectives for Patients* is based on an article by Martin et al, titled "Achilles Pain, Stiffness, and Muscle Power Deficits: Midportion Achilles Tendinopathy Revision 2018" (*J Orthop Sports Phys Ther* 2018;48(5):A1-A38. doi:10.2519/jospt.2018.0302).

This Perspectives article was written by a team of *JOSPT's* editorial board and staff. Deydre S. Teyhen, PT, PhD, Editor, and Jeanne Robertson, Illustrator.

NEW INSIGHTS

To update the 2010 guidelines on Achilles tendon pain, expert clinicians and researchers reviewed research published from 2009 to November 2017. They screened 1409 articles and closely examined 126 of the best papers on this topic to find the strongest evidence for diagnosis/classification, differential diagnosis, examination, and treatment to help decrease pain, improve mobility and function, and return you to your activities following Achilles tendinopathy.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

You may recover quickly or over several months from pain in your Achilles tendon. Although you have pain, you should continue your daily activities within your pain tolerance; it is critical that you avoid complete rest.

Your physical therapist will likely prescribe strength training to aid your recovery. Strength training exercises may use your body weight for resistance, and additional weight may be added to help make your calf muscles stronger. These exercises are typically performed slowly for the best results.

If your pain began recently, your physical therapist may use a treatment called iontophoresis, which delivers a medicine (dexamethasone) to the painful area to reduce soreness and improve function. Your physical therapist can help guide your recovery from Achilles tendinopathy, decreasing pain, improving mobility, and restoring muscle power.

For this and more topics, visit *JOSPT Perspectives for Patients* online at www.jospt.org.



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