AthletiHINTS

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Achilles Tendonitis

Introduction

Achilles tendonitis is a common overuse injury in runners. It is second only to repetitive overexertion and a change in training, such as increasing mileage or hill running.

Mechanism of Injury

The predisposing problem in most cases is excessively tight gastrocnemius and soleus muscles; see diagram below for anatomy. It may also be aggravated by conditions such as tibia cara (bowed shin) and cavus foot (high arch). Symptoms include pain along the tendon just above the heel, both during and after running. There may even be thickening or a grinding in chronic cases.

Treatment

Treatment is aimed first at decreasing inflammation with the use of ice, anti-inflammatory medication and the use of a ¼- to ½-inch heel lift inside the shoe to decrease stress. Stretching exercises are paramount and must include both the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles. Very rarely is surgery necessary, and only in chronic cases where tendon degeneration is present.

Prevention

Prevention is possible by avoiding training errors such as "too much too soon." The "10% Rule" refers to increasing mileage by no more than 10 percent per week. This allows the body to increase fitness, but does not permit breakdown due to too much stress.

Stretches for the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles should be held for 30 seconds each and repeated three times. Stretches should be slow, never ballistic or "jerky". *All* major muscle groups should be stretched before and after a workout.

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