

Tendon injuries: tennis elbow and plantar fascia pain

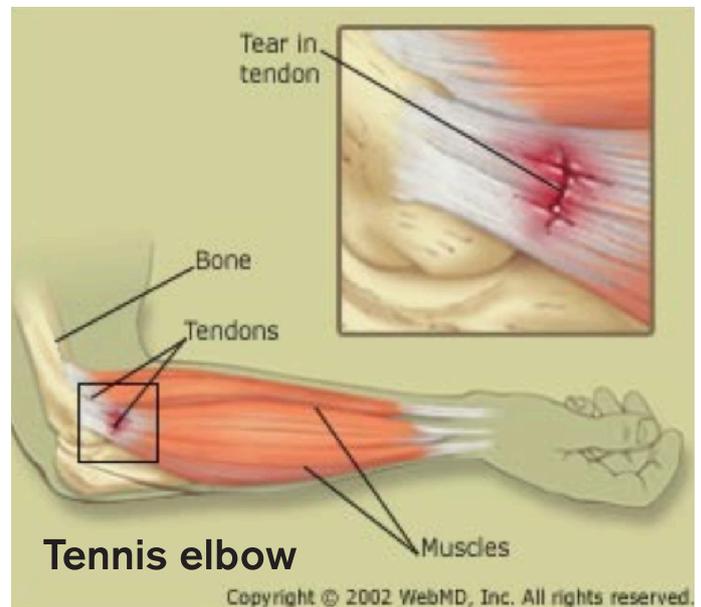
Tendons are made of strong connective tissue that attach muscles to bones. Tendon pain typically arises from repetitive overuse and is not restricted to people who do a lot of sports. The more common conditions arising from tendon injury include tennis elbow, plantar fasciitis (heel pain), Achilles tendon pain and rotator cuff injury (shoulder pain).

Between 3–5% of the population are thought to suffer from tennis elbow and Achilles tendon pain at some point in their life and are often very difficult to treat once the condition becomes chronic.

Based on current research into the nature of tendon injury, it is more accurate to use the term 'tendinopathy' or 'tendinosis' instead of 'tendinitis'. Twenty years ago, it was generally accepted that the underlying pathology in Achilles and heel pain and other tendon injuries was inflammation and this is why the term 'tendinitis' was popularised. Current evidence suggests that tendon pathology is different to the pathology seen in most other tissues and, probably involves what is called a 'failed healing response'. The tendon tissue breaks down and there is an in-growth of new nerves and blood vessels that, unfortunately, appear to be ineffective in healing the pathology and pain. Tendons in this stage of pathology become very weak and painful and are at risk of rupture.

Tendinopathy typically presents with the following pain pattern:

- The pain is usually quite localised to a small area near a joint (i.e. where the tendon is located)
- Pain is felt in the morning upon rising, or after a period of resting in a stationary position
- The pain improves on warming up, so no pain is felt whilst exercising
- Pain returns after exercise



Tendinopathy should be treated as early as possible to prevent further degeneration of the tendon and to prevent the pain from becoming chronic. Osteopathic treatment is directed at addressing excessive muscle tensions that 'pull' on the already-strained tendon; and by manually releasing stiff areas in other parts of the body so that the improved overall body alignment will place less strain and load on the involved tendon.

Specific exercises involving eccentric loading (controlled lengthening of the muscle-tendon against resistance) are also prescribed and carefully monitored to manage the tendinopathy. Tendon problems usually take longer to heal than muscle strains and should be managed differently.

If you suspect that your current pain may be due to a tendon overuse injury, take the guesswork out of your problem and seek an assessment from a qualified health care professional. Tendon pain can be unnecessarily dragged on if it is not properly diagnosed and managed properly.