

What you should know about tendonitis: the good, the bad, and the ugly

By Molly S. Judge, DPM, MollyJudge.com



Tendonitis can cause persistent and bothersome discomfort. Trust me, I have had it myself, and it was no fun. Much of the time, it happens as a simple result of overuse. Mine hit me after shoveling mulch last spring. Yes, shoveling mulch from one big pile, moving it to another location, and then raking it out. After repeating this process again and again, I hated mulch. At our home, mulch represents one of the most grueling forms of yard work.

I hate mulch for a bigger and better reason...because it hurt me. It was the cause of a rip-roaring tendonitis in my right elbow, and it wasn't very pleasant. I couldn't rest at night because it put pressure on the elbow no matter how I laid my arm down. No position or modified strategy of pillow stacking could relieve that nagging ache. By the wee hours of the night, I finally broke down and tried some of my advice for arthritis-type pain. I lathered my elbow with a heating gel and wrapped the entire thing with cling wrap. Sure enough, the cling wrap covered the medication and forced a deep heating sensation down into the elbow, and within moments, I could feel relief. Truly thankful that the relief was so quick, I promptly increased my respect for what the pain of tendonitis represents and decided that it merits sharing with the readers.

Spring is in sight, and that season will be full of activity we left behind in the Fall. This shift in activity level often leads to sprains and strains, especially in the legs, feet, and ankles. With the change in season comes a change in activity level. The legs, feet, and ankles suffer the most as we tend to stay indoors much more over the holidays. You could say that they have enjoyed their long winter's nap. Now, getting back at it can wreak havoc on our bodies.



With a thorough interview and careful consideration of your symptoms, an accurate diagnosis will lead to an effective treatment.

Tendonitis is simply inflammation that causes pain in or around a tendon, usually in the area where it runs around a pulley or attaches to bone. Lower extremity tendonitis is common in the front of the leg and the top of the ankle. Often confused with shin splints, tendonitis does not get better with simple stretching exercises. In fact, aggressive stretching is likely to aggravate the condition.

Since tendonitis results from overuse, repetitive stretching can be expected

to make that worse. This underlines that you need to know the problem before you can effectively treat it. It is essential to make sure you have a diagnosis before beginning therapy. Sounds like common sense, right? You can't be sure you have the right treatment plan without an accurate diagnosis. It is incredible how many people are satisfied with self-diagnosis and ongoing pain because they feel the problem should go away with time.

For a first episode of tendonitis or tendonitis that has been present for less than a few weeks or so, treatment is often effective with something called "relative rest." Relative rest includes splinting or strapping the problem area to stabilize and rest the painful area while still being able to walk and run. Simple removable devices or even a soft cast can often achieve effective relief and return to function.

To figure out approximately how long it will take before you get over this pain, multiply the amount of time you've been experiencing tendonitis by two. So, if you have been nursing tendonitis pain for three weeks, it may take as long as six weeks to get over it completely. Therefore, if tendonitis is your problem, seeking treatment early is your best first step.

Continued on page 24

Tendonitis Facts

Continued from page 23

If you have had a history of numerous bouts of tendonitis, then the answer isn't so simple, and you could be in a downward spiral to pain and loss of function. In this case, a spectrum of damage occurs due to long-standing inflammation around a tendon. This is referred to as tendinopathy. "Tendino" is derived from the Latin "Tendo" to mean tendon. "Pathy" is derived from the Greek "Pathos," meaning disease or suffering. The tendonopathy spectrum begins with simple inflammation and progresses to tendon damage if left unchecked. If left untreated, a tendon can overstretch or even tear. Ultimately, the tendon will lose its ability to glide smoothly, and pain with dysfunction will interfere with your livelihood.

Don't let this happen to you if you have discomfort in your leg, ankle, or foot that you think may be tendinitis. Stop by the office for a consultation. After a focused interview and proper attention to your symptoms, an accurate diagnosis will give you your cure.

For further information to improve the health of your legs, ankles and feet contact Dr. Molly Judge for a formal consultation at Mollyjudge.com or call 419-732-2618.

Dr. Judge treats chronic pain and complex foot and ankle deformity. A focus on conservative treatment is always first. When surgery is needed this is her specialty. Your best is yet to come!