

# It's All About Me Tendonitis

By Jonathan Cluett, M.D.

## What is a Tendon?

A tendon is a tough yet flexible band of fibrous tissue. The tendon is the structure in your body that connects your muscles to the bones. The skeletal muscles in your body are responsible for moving your bones, thus enabling you to walk, jump, lift, and move in many ways. When a muscle contracts it pulls on a bone to cause movements. The structure that transmits the force of the muscle contraction to the bone is called a tendon.

Tendons come in many shapes and sizes. Some are very small, like the ones that cause movements of your fingers, and some are much larger, such as your Achilles tendon in your heel. When functioning normally, these tendons glide easily and smoothly as the muscle contracts.

In some cases a tendon will run within a sheath. Inflammation of this sheath can cause an entrapment of the tendon, as is the case in the syndrome trigger finger.

## What is Tendonitis?

Sometimes the tendons become inflamed for a variety of reasons, and the action of pulling the muscle becomes irritating. If the normal smooth gliding motion of your tendon is impaired, the tendon will become inflamed and movement will become painful. This is called tendonitis, and literally means inflammation of the tendon.

## What Causes Tendonitis?

The most common cause of tendonitis is overuse. Commonly, individuals begin an exercise program, or increase their level of exercise, and begin to experience symptoms of tendonitis. The tendon is unaccustomed to the new level of demand, and this overuse will cause an inflammation and tendonitis.

Another common cause of symptoms of tendonitis is due to age-related changes of the tendon. As people age, the tendons lose their elasticity and ability to glide as smoothly as they used to. With increasing age, individuals are more prone to developing symptoms of tendonitis. The cause

of these age-related changes is not entirely understood, but may be due to changes in the blood vessels that supply nutrition to the tendons.

Sometimes, there is an anatomical cause for tendonitis. If the tendon does not have a smooth path to glide along, it will be more likely to become irritated and inflamed. In these unusual situations, surgical treatment may be necessary to realign the tendon.

## How Can I Treat Tendonitis?

Tendonitis treatment must begin by avoiding aggravating movements. This may mean taking a break from a favorite activity for a period of time, but this is a necessary step to allow the inflamed tendon to heal. It is also recommended in tendonitis treatment to try alternative activities; for example, if you are a runner who is experiencing knee pain due to tendonitis, try incorporating swimming into your workout schedule.

Inflammation can also be treated with some medications, including the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin or Advil. These medications can be very helpful treatments both in relief of pain and in reduction of the inflammation. As always, before starting a medication, check first with your doctor.

Side effects of these medications can include stomach upset and bleeding problems. Other possible medications to use are steroid injections. See your doctor for more information about this tendonitis treatment possibility.

Other means of tendonitis treatment include icing the injured site, ultrasound therapy, and many alternative treatments. Often a trip to the physical therapist can be helpful. Working to stretch and strengthen muscles in the area of the tendonitis can be helpful, and the therapist may have other ideas to help with your situation. As stated earlier, surgery is occasionally needed, but only after these non-surgical tendonitis treatment measures have failed to work.

## Are There Ways to Avoid Tendonitis?

The key to avoiding problems such as tendonitis and bursitis is to slowly increase the intensity of your exercise, vary the types of activities you perform, and try not to cycle between periods of activity and inactivity. People who tend to experience tendonitis are seasonal exercisers, who focus too much on one activity. When you begin to experience early symptoms of tendonitis, back off from the aggravating activity, and try something new.

## Will Tendonitis Return After Treatment?

Not necessarily, but it certainly may. If you do experience tendonitis, you are more likely to have symptoms again down the road, but with an intelligent approach to your exercise or activity routine, this problem can often be avoided.

*(Editor's Note: Jonathan Cluett, M.D. is chief resident of orthopaedic surgery at a hospital in Washington, D.C.)*



**Duinick Bros. Inc.**

**GOLF**

New Construction • Renovation  
Restoration • Laser Leveling Tees  
Drainage • Green Construction

**800-328-8949**  
**www.dbigolf.com**

P.O. Box 208, Prinsburg, MN 56281

