

Tendinitis / Tendinopathy

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What Is Tendinopathy?

Tendinopathy is a general term for pain and irritation in a tendon. A tendon is a strong, rope-like tissue that connects muscle to bone. When a tendon is overworked or strained, it can become painful and irritated. You may also hear these terms:

- **Tendinitis:** short-term irritation of a tendon (often thought of as “inflammation”)
- **Tendinosis:** longer-term wear-and-tear changes in the tendon
- **Tendinopathy:** overall term that includes both conditions

Common Symptoms

Tendon problems often develop gradually and may include:

- Aching or soreness near a joint
- Sharp pain with movement or activity
- Tenderness when pressing on the tendon
- Mild swelling or thickening in the area
- Pain that worsens with repeated use
- Stiffness or discomfort after rest

Common Areas Affected

Tendinopathy can occur in many parts of the body, including:

- Shoulder (rotator cuff)
- Elbow (“tennis elbow” or “golfer’s elbow”)
- Knee (patellar tendon, “jumper’s knee”)
- Hip (hip flexor or gluteal tendons)
- Achilles tendon (back of the ankle/heel)
- Wrist or thumb

What Causes It?

Tendinopathy is usually caused by:

- Repetitive overuse or repetitive motion
- Sudden increase in activity or exercise
- Poor movement mechanics or posture
- Weakness or muscle imbalance
- Inadequate recovery between activities
- Aging or gradual tissue wear over time

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms and a physical exam.

Imaging is not always needed, but may include:

- **X-rays** to rule out bone problems
- **Ultrasound or MRI** to evaluate tendon damage in more persistent cases

Treatment Options

Conservative Care

- Activity modification (reducing painful movements, not complete rest)
- Gradual strengthening exercises (especially controlled loading of the tendon)
- Stretching and mobility work
- Ice for pain relief in early or irritated stages
- Manual therapy and soft tissue treatment
- Correcting movement patterns and posture
- Home exercise program
- A key part of recovery is **gradually reloading the tendon** to help it become stronger over time.

Medical Treatment

If symptoms persist, treatment may include:

- Anti-inflammatory medications (short-term use)
- Cortisone injections (in selected cases; may provide short-term relief)
- Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) or other regenerative injections in chronic cases
- Surgery in rare, severe, or long-standing cases

What Is the Outlook?

Recovery depends on how long the condition has been present:

- **Acute tendon irritation:** often improves in a few weeks to a couple of months
- **Chronic tendinopathy:** may take 3–6 months or longer to fully recover

Most patients improve with the right combination of rest, gradual strengthening, and activity changes.

Typical Treatment Schedule

Many patients are seen:

- **2–3 visits per week for 3–4 weeks** initially
- Care is then adjusted based on progress and goals
- Full recovery depends on consistency with home exercises and gradual return to activity

Key Takeaway

Tendinopathy is a “load-related” injury. The tendon usually heals best not by complete rest, but by **carefully controlled movement and strengthening over time**.