

POSTERIOR TIBIAL TENDON DYSFUNCTION



WHAT IS THE POSTERIOR TIBIAL TENDON?

The Posterior Tibial Tendon starts in the lower part of the inside of the leg, runs behind the inner ankle, and attaches to a bone approximately a third of the way on the inside of the foot. This tendon helps to transfer the powerful forces from the tibialis posterior muscle to the foot.

When the muscle contracts, the tendon pulls on the bone and foot movement occurs. The central role of the posterior tibial tendon is to help maintain the arch of the foot during weight-bearing – without its influence the arch of the foot will drop, subjecting surrounding ligaments and joints to extra loading, leading to a flattened foot appearance.

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'DYSFUNCTION'?

If the tendon is subject to excess or repetitive stresses this may lead to microscopic wear and tear in the tendon fibres. If this continues unchecked it may lead to a thickening, tearing or even rupturing of the tendon. Understandably this can be very painful and is a common cause of Adult Acquired Flat Foot. Damage can also occur to the tendon as a result of a sudden, acute injury.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Pain is the most obvious symptom, and may be felt most keenly around the inside of the foot and ankle. In severe cases this may spread to the outside of the foot if the arch collapses inwards squeezing the bones against the ankle on the opposite side. Pain often worsens with activity and is usually, but not always, accompanied by swelling.

HOW CAN IT BE TREATED?

Posterior tibial tendon dysfunction can be graded 1-4 according to the severity of the problem. However, it is a potentially serious problem regardless of the grading and it is important to stop sports participation immediately – if you don't then any forces acting on the rear of your foot could exacerbate the injury.

Treatment relies on a combination of approaches but will primarily concentrate on offloading the tendon, sometimes by taping the foot, to allow the inflamed, damaged tissue to recover. In severe cases, more drastic immobilisation may be necessary. Icing the affected area will help and you will most probably be prescribed some stretching, strengthening and balancing exercises to do at home.

You will be given footwear advice and asked to modify your activities to allow time for healing. Biomechanical devices, such as orthotics, maybe issued, and you will be advised regarding a gradual return your chosen activity.

Most people respond well to conservative treatment, but if your condition is not improving then your podiatrist may request medical imaging such as ultrasound or MRI scanning. In some cases it may be appropriate for you to be referred to a surgeon for possible tendon repair – your podiatrist will be able to advise you on this.

Important:

Posterior tibial tendinopathy/dysfunction should **NOT** be confused with posterior tibial tendonitis.

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.