

Chronic tendon pain: what are your options?



Written by Board Certified Sports Medicine and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Physician
Judith Peterson, MD



Tendonitis is a common problem in those who do repetitive work, participate in sports, play instruments, or dance. Tendons are bands of very tough tissue that usually connect muscles to bones. When tendons get inflamed or irritated that is the condition known as “tendonitis.”

People who participate in these types of activities place stress on tendons causing the tendon to become symptomatic and painful. Some common types of tendonitis affect the shoulder (rotator cuff tendonitis), the calf (Achilles tendonitis), the elbow (tennis elbow), the thumb (DeQuervain’s Disease) and the knee (Jumper’s knee). For some patients the pain of an acute tendon injury never really goes away. The elbow continues to hurt; the ankle or shoulder stubbornly stays sore for weeks on end. This is the more chronic condition known as tendonopathy. The tendon itself has

changed structure, becoming disordered and weakened.

People who are bothered by a chronic tendon problem that is painful and interfering with activity should talk with their doctors about options in the treatment of their particular condition. Many times a doctor can suggest a simple change in stretching routines, or guidelines for icing or the use of heat that will help the problem. Ice helps decrease swelling and inflammation around tendons, and heat – if used correctly – can help to get blood to flow to the tendon, helping the tendon to repair itself. Specific exercise programs that load the tendon as the muscle is lengthening, called eccentric exercises, have shown promise for these frustrating injuries. One common example of an eccentric type of exercise is slowly lowering a weight toward the floor with your biceps muscle.

Additional treatments may be of help. Direct needling of the tendon, usually

under ultrasound guidance, has helped many patients with symptom control. This technique may help promote the healing process. This procedure can also be combined with platelet rich plasma injections (PRP). Many people will have heard of PRP injections because famous athletes such as Kobe Bryant and Tiger Woods have had this treatment. PRP treatment requires that a sample of your own blood be withdrawn and then specially handled to increase the concentration of platelets. This special preparation of your own blood is then injected into the injured area, usually using ultrasound guidance.

Patients with chronic tendon problems should speak with their primary care provider to explore what treatment options will be the most helpful in treating their tendon problem. We want you to get back to your activity as quickly – and as safely – as possible.

For more information or to schedule an appointment please call 605-665-1152.