

PATIENT INFORMATION

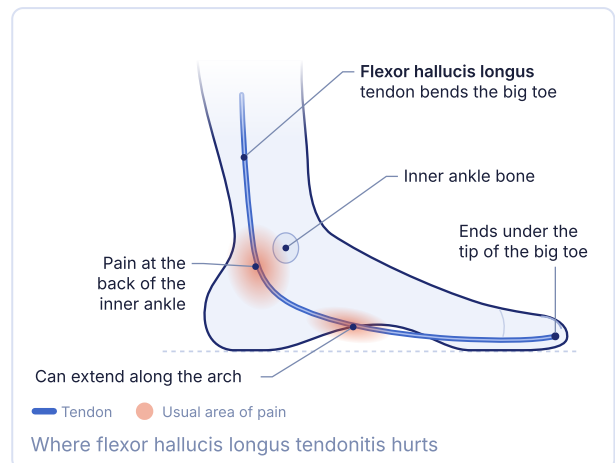
Flexor Hallucis Longus Tendonitis

Causes, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment

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IN SHORT

Flexor hallucis longus (FHL) tendonitis is irritation of the tendon that bends the big toe. It causes pain at the back of the inner ankle, sometimes along the arch, and is most common in dancers and runners who push off hard through the big toe. It usually responds to the right loading programme and changes to training.



What is flexor hallucis longus tendonitis?

Irritation of the tendon that bends the big toe, usually where it runs behind the inner ankle. The flexor hallucis longus (FHL) runs from the back of the lower leg, behind the inner ankle bone and under the arch to the tip of the big toe. It helps you push off when you walk, run or rise onto your toes.

What does it feel like?

Pain at the back of the inner ankle, sometimes running along the arch.

- Pain pushing off or rising onto your toes
- Tenderness behind the inner ankle bone
- Pain bending the big toe against resistance
- Sometimes a clicking or catching feeling

Who gets it?

People who spend a lot of time pushing off through the big toe.

- Dancers, where it is sometimes called dancer's tendinitis
- Runners, especially with more hills or speed work
- Anyone who has recently increased walking, hiking or time on their toes

What causes it?

Usually more load than the tendon is used to.

- A sudden increase in training, hills, speed or jumping
- Repeated push-off through the big toe
- Foot mechanics that make the tendon work harder
- Tightness or weakness in the calf and foot

What else can feel similar?

Several problems cause pain in the same area, so an accurate diagnosis matters. Posterior tibial tendonitis, sesamoiditis, irritation at the back of the ankle joint and nerve irritation can all cause similar symptoms, and each is managed differently.

How is it diagnosed?

Usually through a clinical examination. We test the tendon against resistance, check how the big toe and ankle move, and assess how you walk or run on our treadmill using Onform joint tracking software. Ultrasound or MRI is arranged if the picture is unclear or not improving.

How is it treated?

With progressive loading and by changing what overloaded the tendon, rather than complete rest.

- A strengthening programme for the tendon, calf and foot
- Adjusting training, especially hills, speed and time on the toes
- Footwear advice and orthotics where foot mechanics add load
- Manual therapy, and shockwave therapy for persistent cases

How long does it take to settle?

It depends on how long it has been there and how quickly the load is adjusted. Recent cases tend to settle faster than long-standing ones, which is why it is worth getting it checked early rather than training through it.

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FROM THE CLINIC

“Pain at the back of the inner ankle has a few possible causes, and this tendon is easy to overlook. I check it alongside the posterior tibial tendon and the big toe joint, and I look at how you push off, because that is usually what keeps it irritated.”

William Joyce, Consultant Podiatrist, The Functional Podiatrist

Three things you can do today

- 1 Ease off hills, speed work and time on your toes for now.
- 2 Keep moving within comfort: complete rest rarely helps a tendon.
- 3 Choose supportive shoes over very flexible or flat ones.

When to see a podiatrist

- Pain lasting more than 1 to 2 weeks despite cutting back
- Pain or weakness pushing off through the big toe
- The big toe clicking, catching or locking
- Swelling at the back of the inner ankle
- Numbness or tingling in the sole of the foot

Get it properly assessed

Your treatment plan depends on what is driving the problem. We assess, explain what we find and build a plan around your activity and goals.

HCPC-registered podiatrists in Richmond (Pools in the Park, TW9 2SF) and Kensington (Sprint Physiotherapy, W8 4LY). No referral needed.

All the conditions we treat: thefunctionalpodiatrist.uk/conditions.html

Book an assessment

Call 020 3576 0630

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