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PATIENT INFORMATION

Posterior Tibial Tendonitis (PTTD)

Causes, stages, symptoms and treatment

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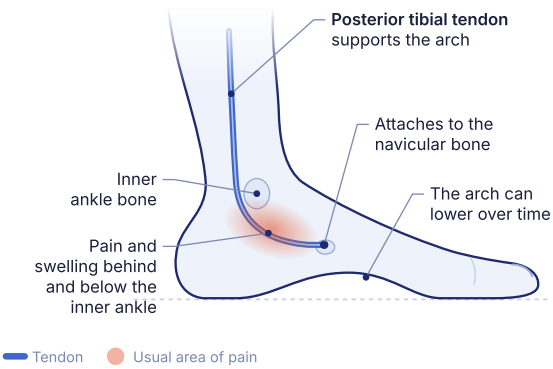

Where posterior tibial tendonitis hurts

IN SHORT

Posterior tibial tendonitis is overload of the tendon that runs behind the inner ankle bone and holds up the arch. It causes pain and swelling on the inside of the ankle, and over time the arch can flatten, a process called posterior tibial tendon dysfunction (PTTD). Caught early, most cases improve within 6 to 10 weeks.

What is posterior tibial tendonitis?

Overload of the tendon that runs behind the inner ankle bone and supports the arch. The tendon controls how far the foot rolls in and supports it as you push off. When it is overloaded it can become inflamed, develop small tears and gradually weaken. This spectrum is called posterior tibial tendon dysfunction (PTTD).

What does it feel like?

Pain and tenderness along the inside of the ankle, just below the ankle bone.

- Swelling on the inner ankle or along the tendon
- Arch pain or tiredness after activity
- Difficulty rising onto tiptoe on that foot
- The arch gradually flattening

What are the stages of PTTD?

It is usually described in three stages, and the stage guides treatment.

- Stage I: the tendon is painful but intact, and the arch is normal
- Stage II: the tendon has partly failed and the arch is collapsing, but still flexible
- Stage III: the flat foot has become rigid, and a surgical opinion is usually needed

What causes it?

Usually more load than the tendon can handle.

- The foot rolling in (overpronation)
- A jump in walking or running, especially on hard surfaces
- Hypermobility
- Weak calf and hip muscles
- Flat, unsupportive footwear

Is it the same as flat feet?

Not exactly. PTTD can cause or worsen a flat foot over time, but many people with flat feet do not have it. The key question is whether the tendon itself is struggling, which is what we assess.

How is it diagnosed?

Mainly through a clinical examination. A key test is the single-leg heel raise: being unable to do a pain-free heel raise on that foot is a strong sign. We also look at foot posture, calf strength and the tendon along its length, and arrange ultrasound or MRI if the stage needs confirming.

How is it treated?

Treatment is matched to the stage, and early stages respond well to conservative care.

- A progressive loading programme for the tendon, calf and hips
- Orthotics or arch support to offload the tendon
- Taping or bracing during flare-ups
- Shockwave therapy for persistent cases
- Injection only selectively, as it can weaken the tendon

Is it OK to walk with it?

Usually yes, within limits. In the early stages modified activity is often possible with the right support. High-impact running is usually reduced while the tendon settles.

How long does it take to heal?

Stage I usually responds within 6 to 10 weeks; stage II often takes 3 to 6 months. Stage III needs specialist orthopaedic input, with treatment focused on comfort and function.

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FROM THE CLINIC

"The earlier I see a posterior tibial tendon problem, the more effectively it can be managed without surgery. A single-leg heel raise tells me a lot, and I would always rather check the tendon early than wait for the arch to change."

William Joyce, Consultant Podiatrist, The Functional Podiatrist

Three things you can do today

1. Avoid sudden increases in walking or running.
2. Wear supportive shoes, and avoid bare feet on hard floors.
3. If the inner ankle is swollen, ice it for 10 to 15 minutes, wrapped in a cloth.

When to see a podiatrist

- Pain or swelling on the inside of the ankle
- Difficulty rising onto tiptoe on one foot
- Arch tiredness after walking or standing
- One arch looking flatter than the other

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.

More on this condition: thefunctionalpodiatrist.uk/posterior-tibial-tendonitis.html

Book an assessment

Call 020 3576 0630

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