

RUNNER'S WORLD

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ASK THE EXPERTS

GOING DOWNHILL: To run smoother on the downhill, pick up your leg turnover and step lightly.



FOOT CARE

Aching Achilles

My Achilles tendon feels hot, painful, and swollen where it attaches to the heel bone. It started bothering me after I ran hills, and became aggravated when I stepped up on a curb while running. Rest doesn't seem to help. What's wrong?

—D.S. KNOXVILLE, TN

Sounds like your Achilles suffered a "one-two punch." Repetitive hill running is stressful to the calf muscles and Achilles tendon. And stepping on a curb is a common way for runners to partially tear the Achilles where it attaches at the heel. Because the Achilles has poor blood supply, it warms

up slowly and heals slowly. Your calf is probably going to feel sore and tight until the blood gets flowing and it loosens up.

I recommend you take a few rest days, and ice the area several times a day for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Keep the heel and ankle wrapped with an elastic bandage or brace to help reduce swelling, and put a cushioned heel cup in your shoe to elevate and cradle your heel. Take some ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatories. And get in the habit of working your ankle by flexing and extending your foot for 15 seconds every time you get up after sitting for more than 30 minutes. This will get the blood pumping to your calf and stimulate lubricating fluid that will ease movement of the Achilles.

Don't try running until you can walk without limping. Stretch your calves regularly, especially once you resume running. Work on strengthening your calf muscles by doing calf raises. Lift your heels up on your toes and lower down for a 10-second count. Repeat 10 times. If there's no significant improvement after 3 weeks, see a sports podiatrist for a soft cast or a prescription for

physical therapy. He or she may suggest an x-ray to determine if a bone spur is present, or an MRI or diagnostic ultrasound to verify the extent of the injury.

If the stubborn runner in you is has trouble taking it easy, beware: An Achilles that's painful for more than 6 months may require surgery or a new treatment called extracorporeal shock wave therapy.

—Rick Braver, M.D., sports podiatrist in Englewood, N.J., and member of the RUNNER'S WORLD Science Advisory Board

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