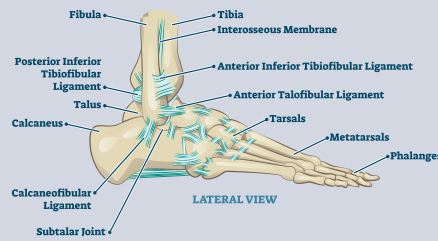


Foot and Ankle Conditions and Treatments



TENDINITIS/TENDON CONTRACTURE OF THE FOOT

What is flexor tendinitis?

It is swelling of the tendon(s) that bends the toes. The tendons are smooth, thick ropes that allow the foot to move, bend and straighten. The tendons connect the muscles of the lower leg to the foot and toes and the muscles pull on the tendons to bend the toes and balance the foot on the ankle.

What causes flexor tendinitis?

Tendon swelling and inflammation result from repetitive strain and strenuous activities involving the lower leg, ankle and foot. Inflammation narrows the space around the affected tendon sheath, the tendon thickens and may form nodules or micro tears at the bends and most strenuous portions of the tendon. As the tendon tissue expands (swells) it impinges on the tendon causing pain and restricted motion - sometimes causing nerve irritation. The cause is unknown, but certain medical conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes increase the risk of developing tendonitis. Tendonitis commonly affects those with careers in which walking is a large portion of the day.

How is it treated?

Conservative measures including rest, ice, splinting, and gentle stretching exercises help to decrease stiffness and improve range of motion. Over-the-counter medications can help to relieve pain and inflammation. Supportive arch supports to decrease strain on the foot and tendons throughout the day. Sometimes, immobilization in a walking boot or cast can decrease symptoms. Physical therapy is also an option to attempt reduction of pain by strengthening.

Steroid injections may be recommended to reduce inflammation and improve symptoms, and temporarily avoid surgery. If that fails, surgery will be considered.

When is surgery a good option?

When conservative treatment fails and there is significant pain and loss of function, surgery may be recommended. Surgery can be an outpatient procedure called percutaneous release performed under local anesthetic to release the tendon. For more severe cases, surgery in the operating room must be considered.

Most patients who have surgery will find relief from the pain and stiffness. Physical therapy may be recommended to restoration of range of motion, and relieve stiffness after surgery.