



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Extracorporeal shockwave therapy (ESWT) for achilles tendinopathy and plantar fasciitis

Issued by MSK Podiatry Service

This leaflet explains about the use of ESWT to treat achilles tendinopathy and plantar fasciitis (sometimes referred to as plantar fasciopathy/fasciosis). It includes information on the benefits, risks and any alternative treatments, as well as what you can expect when you come to the department for shockwave treatment.

What is Extracorporeal Shockwave Therapy?

Extracorporeal Shock Wave Therapy (ESWT) is a non-invasive treatment where a hand-held device introduces energy to painful areas, promoting a healing response.

What are shockwaves?

Shockwaves are high-energy, non-audible, sound waves which are transmitted to the affected area to accelerate healing. The treatment increases blood flow, decreases localised pain and stimulates cell regeneration - this encourages the body to repair itself. Shockwaves also break down injured tissue and calcifications.

Why should I have ESWT?

ESWT is offered to patients who have been suffering with symptoms for more than three months and have also failed to respond other treatments, such as, stretching and strengthening exercises, footwear changes, orthotics (insoles), night splints, ice therapy and pain relief. It is a minimally invasive treatment that is carried out in clinic.

Who cannot have ESWT?

There are very few reasons why you can't have ESWT. These include:

- Pregnancy
- If you are under the age of 18
- If you have a pacemaker
- If you have a blood clotting disorder or you are taking any medication to thin your blood (excluding Aspirin)
- Internal metal work or prosthetic joint near the treatment site
- Inflammation, open wound or suspected infection at the treatment site
- If you have had a steroid injection in the last 12 weeks
- If you have been diagnosed with epilepsy
- On-going cancer treatment/review

There are also a number of different medications that reduce inflammation and/or suppress the immune system. Taking this medication wouldn't stop you having the treatment but may make it less effective. Your podiatrist will discuss this with you before starting any treatment.

Is ESWT safe?

As long as you don't fall into one of the categories above, then yes, ESWT is safe and has been deemed so by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE). There is a small risk of tendon or ligament rupture and damage to the soft tissue, but this will be monitored before and after each treatment session.

How many treatments will I need?

You must ensure that you are available for between 3 and 6 treatment sessions. These sessions will normally be spaced one week apart. You will be offered a follow up appointment 12 weeks after your last treatment.

How effective is ESWT?

ESWT is a clinically proven treatment. There is a growing body of evidence showing it to be effective in up to 70% of cases of chronic conditions, such as plantar fasciitis. Unfortunately, like any treatment, there is no guarantee that it will benefit everyone and it is also important to note that ESWT only forms part of your individual treatment plan. ESWT will need to be combined with other appropriate treatments, such as: high intensity loading, stretching exercises, foot orthoses and/or night splints.

What happens during ESWT?

The treatment will be given in the podiatry department. Once the risks and benefits have been explained fully you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be asked to lie on your front with your legs supported by a pillow. The clinician will put some ultrasound gel on the injured area and then place the hand piece of the device on the gel. The ESWT is delivered using a hand piece – it delivers compressed air pulses through the ultrasound gel. Each treatment will take approximately five minutes.

Is ESWT painful?

Pain levels will vary from person to person but any discomfort during treatment should be tolerable. Due to the analgesic effect of ESWT many patients report immediate pain relief following treatment. If you experience pain after treatment you may use ordinary non-prescription painkillers such as paracetamol. It is not advisable to take any anti-inflammatory medication as this may interfere with the body's self-healing process.

How long does each treatment take?

You will be given a 15 minute appointment and the actual treatment time of ESWT is approximately 5 minutes.

What happens after ESWT?

After the treatment you will be able to get up and walk straight away. You can drive immediately after the treatment. If you do experience discomfort following the shockwave treatment you can take over-the-counter painkillers (such as paracetamol) but don't take anti-inflammatory medication (such as ibuprofen) or use ice therapy, as these can interfere with the body's healing process. It takes several days for the injuries to begin to heal but many patients see an improvement before the end of the second week. The healing process can however take weeks or even months to complete.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You will be able to return to your usual activities, including returning to work, (depending on what your occupation is, please speak to your podiatrist about this) straight away. However, we advise you not to undertake any strenuous, pain-provoking activity or high-impact exercise for 48 hours after the procedure. You will be offered a follow up appointment 12 weeks after your last treatment.

If you experience a sudden onset of pain to the area or any loss of function, please contact the podiatry department for advice or ring 111 if outside of office hours.

Consent – asking for your consent

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to your podiatrist.

Further sources of information

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

NICE has produced recommendations for patients on ESWT for achilles tendinopathy and plantar fasciitis. These documents can be accessed on the NICE website: www.nice.org.uk

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

www.northumbria.nhs.uk



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