



# Coach-Athlete Q&A

A look at some coach-replies to common questions by topic.

**Q: Subject:** Achilles injury.....Hi Sonni-

My dad said that he spoke with you yesterday about my Achilles injury. He couldn't remember exactly what you told him, and he told me to email you and ask you. Do you have any advice as to what I can do to get rid of this injury for good? I cant run for a week (next Monday I'll be able to run) and I'd really like to be able to train right again. I've been biking and lifting still. If you have any suggestions, I'd follow them to the letter! Thanks, A.L.

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**A:** Hey A.....Sonni here. Sorry about the delay. Extremely busy last week w/ the Duke Half-Ironman in Raleigh.

About your achilles.....of course you need to keep icing it, take an anti-inflammatory like ibuprophen, and massage/stretch it daily. Also, I'd reccomend going to a drug store and buying a heel-insert to **LIFT** the heel inside your shoes (shortening the achilles while it heals).

Now all the reccomendations are fine and well.....BUT they only address the **symptom** (PAIN). And when runners only address the symptom, when the pain goes away.....they, of course, begin to run again and it can return. This on and off cycle is bad in that it creates CHRONIC achilles tendonitis (w/ residual scar tissue) that never fully heals.

So.....what to do??

Don't JUST treat the pain (w/ ice, vit 'i', massage, etc....).....**treat the SOURCE of that pain.**

And here's the source:

Know that when someone gets achilles tendonitis, it's (despite what doctors like to tell you) rarely "*overuse*". When a doctor tells an endurance athlete "overuse".....he's really saying "I don't know.....so you must be doing something too much."

Unless it's as a result of some sort of trauma (like an ankle twist).....achilles tendonitis is usually a result of some sort of **muscular imbalance**. Think of your achilles as an "attachment point" of a 'chain' of very durable and strong muscles beginning w/ the calf muscles (gastroc, etc...), then the hamstring, then the super-powerful glutes (rear-end). The upper "attachment point" is around the area of what called your "I.T. Band".

Now what all the muscles have in common is that they are on the 'backside' of your legs.....the POSTERIOR side. As they get stronger and stronger and stronger.....if there is no opposing muscles to **BALANCE** that strength.....things get tighter and tighter and tighter. And where this tightness shows up is @ one of the 2 attachment areas.....the achilles or the I.T. Band.

If you want to address the SOURCE of the achilles trouble, **you must achieve muscular strength balance!** And that will happen only by strengthening the FRONT ("anterior") side of the leg.....and loosening up that back side by stretching ALL THE MUSCLES in the 'chain'.

Now.....before I tell you how to do this.....any guesses on how you got so strong (imbalanced) on that posterior side of the legs?? My guess is that you've been riding the bike alot, huh? Nothing strengthens the glutes like riding in the mountains. So what you need to focus on is strengthening the opposing muscles of those glutes.....the **HIP FLEXORS**.

What to do:

-1st.....you MUST slide the seat of our bike more forward. An improper bike fit is the 1st mistake. You undoubtedly have a bike-fit for a cyclist (like a bike-shop fit).....who doesn't have to get off and run or need to worry about achilles stress. I'd bet that your road bike is set @ a 73 or 74 seat-tube angle. You need it at 76+ degrees AT LEAST. Let me know if you need help w/ this.

-you can strenthen the hip-flexors in 2 ways.....anaerobically (in the weight room) & aerobically (w/ repetitive motions for longish durations). I reccomend both.

**\*In the gym:** do several exercise like seated knee lifts, hanging knee lifts, reverse crunches, oblique crunches, ab machine crunches, and even leg extensions, etc. Begin slowly.....but work your way up to being able to do each til failure 3x week.



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**\*On the bike:** (w/ your seat slide more forward).....hook up your bike to your stationary trainer. Put very little resistance on it. Then.....spin for 10minutes to warm-up. Then, pedal 1-legged for 1-2 minutes.....switch to the other leg & do the same.....then spin w/ both for 1-2 minutes. Repeat this sequence for 20 minutes @ first. Work your way up to 1 hour. Your hip-flexors will be screaming. This is good.

-Next.....stretch the glutes, hams, and calves daily. And of course.....continue w/ the ice, ibuprophen, wearing the heel insert/lift and rest (from running on it).

It takes time.....but it will get better. Further running on it (w/ ANY PAIN) only adds to the scar-tissue that's currently there. And there's only so much room in that tendon's 'sheath' that the tendon slides through. Another thing.....if it's to the point that it's REALLY bad (hurts to do any walking).....then some ART may be needed. That is **Active Release Therapy** by a certified practitioner. It hurts like the devil.....but it helps to remove residual scar tissue.

I hope all this helps. Let me know if you need further help or would like to schedule a time to meet for a bike-fit (this is key) or a weight room session where I lay out a 'balance-specific session' for you.

I'm booked for the next 2 weeks (until the National Iron-distance Tri Championships in Florida on 10/19).....but will be available after that.

**Sonni Dyer**