

A potion for tendon pain?

Tendinopathy which can be a debilitating condition is often seen in triathletes and other endurance athletes. More often than not it is the result of overload beyond what the body can tolerate, often in the presence of underlying weaknesses or biomechanical faults. Achilles tendinopathy is one of the most common injuries I see in Hong Kong triathletes.

There is generally a continuum of tendinopathy from what is known as a reactive phase to a dysrepair phase and finally a degenerative phase. Essentially this classification model is reflective of what is happening at a cellular level.

A 2008 study by some leading Australian clinicians who are experts in tendon injury management has suggested that a combination of medication known as a “polypill” may be helpful in reducing acute tendon pain (ie: when tendinopathy presents in the reactive phase or as an acute flare up).

A combination of an anti-inflammatory (specifically Ibuprofen), antibiotic (Doxycycline) and optional addition of non-pharmacological products (Green tea and Omega 3 fish oils) for 14-28 days has been thought to have a positive effect, with an optimal effect after 3 weeks. To note is that I would only suggest this approach for adults and not children.

The proposed mechanism for this working is complex, but basically suggests that the above products may help inhibit changes in tendon cell matrix seen in tendon pathology as it develops; as well as inhibit certain substances thought to cause pain and tendon cell structural changes.

The suggested dosage is Ibuprofen 400mg three times a day with food (ie – 1200mg per day), and Doxycycline 100mg per day. Green tea and fish oils can be taken as advised or desired. Please also note that it is advised to see a Dr or authorised medical professional for obtaining the anti-inflammatories and antibiotics to check whether you are fit to take them.

Whilst load management and correction of contributing abnormal biomechanics is critical in tendon injury management, a “polypill” approach as mentioned above may also help in certain acutely painful cases.