

Surgical Repair of the Achilles Tendon

Recovery Expectations and Benchmarks

Given that most of the Achilles tendon ruptures we see here in San Francisco involve young and active patients, it is not surprising that the most often asked question is: **“How long will it take to recover after Achilles Surgery?”** This is then usually followed with several questions that will help the Achilles surgery patient get a clear picture of the recovery process after an Achilles tendon repair surgery. The following milestones can be used as targets to pace yourself and determine how your recovery is going relative to reported averages of those who have undergone surgical repair of a completely torn or ruptured Achilles Tendon.

Phase I: Strict Immobilization. For the first 2-3 weeks you will keep the splint or cast in place at all times. You should not move the ankle or the Achilles tendon at all. Strict non-weight-bearing (DO NOT even rest the foot on the floor). Use crutches.

Phase II: Early Range of motion. Somewhere between 2-3 weeks after surgery, Dr. Segler will remove your sutures. He will come to your home to do this during a post-operative house call. 48 hours after your stitches come out, you can get the foot and leg wet, but still no weight or standing on the foot. You can however start gentle passive range of motion exercises 3-5 times per day. Remove the splint or boot, perform the exercises and then replace the splint or boot. Stop and call Dr. Segler immediately if you have any pain while doing any of the gentle exercises.

Passive ankle plantarflexion: If you have been wearing a fracture walking boot or surgical splint, remove it. While seated, stretch your leg out in front of you. Keep your leg slightly bent at the knee. Press your foot down as if you were pressing the gas pedal in your car. Hold for 3 seconds. Slowly release. Do 3 sets of 10. Replace the splint or fracture walking boot when you are done. It should not hurt. Repeat 3-5 times per day.



Passive ankle dorsiflexion: If you have been wearing a splint or fracture walking boot, remove it. While seated, stretch your leg out in front of you. Keep your leg slightly bent at the knee. Point your toes up towards your nose. You will feel a stretch in the back of your leg, Achilles tendon and calf muscle. Hold for 3 seconds. Slowly release. It should not hurt. Do 3 sets of 10. Repeat 3-5 times per day. Replace the splint or fracture boot when you are done.



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Recovery Expectations and Benchmarks (Continued)

Phase III: Early Weight-bearing. Somewhere between 4-6 weeks after surgery, Dr. Segler will instruct you to begin graduated weight bearing. It will take about 2 weeks of effort to walk without crutches while wearing a boot to protect the Achilles tendon. By 6 weeks after surgery you should be walking in a boot with a heel lift. The heel lift will gradually be removed over the next 2-3 weeks.

Phase IV: Functional Rehabilitation. The period from 4-12 weeks after surgery, will be a time of intensely focused efforts to regain ankle motion and Achilles tendon strength. Stationary cycling and swimming will be hugely beneficial in this phase.

When can I get the leg wet? Only 48 hours after your sutures are removed by Dr. Segler. Sutures are typically removed at about 2-3 weeks after surgery.

When can I walk? Most patients will begin walking protected in a fracture walking boot between 4-6 weeks with a heel lift. By 8 weeks, you should be walking without a boot. DO NOT TRY THIS until Dr. Segler specifically instructs you to do so.

When can I run? Gentle running is allowed when you can pass the "1-footed tiptoe test." In this test, you will be required to stand on the tiptoes of the leg with the ruptured Achilles tendon for 5 seconds for 10 times. DO NOT TRY THIS until Dr. Segler specifically instructs you to do so. Once you start running Dr. Segler will address your goals, your stage of recover and level of ability with an appropriate individualized running/training program. If you have a professional coach, you may want him/her to be present at your follow-up appointment to discuss specifics.

How long does it take to get to pre-injury level of competition? You should expect a return to pre-injury levels of running and other sports at about 6 month after surgery. The very best case scenarios reported are in superstar healers (including lucky professional athletes with good karma) who may see a return to high activity at 14 weeks. Expect 6 months, but eat right, rest, & hope for the best.

Call me anytime with questions.

Dr. Christopher Segler

236 WEST PORTAL AVENUE, SUITE #332, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94127-1423

PH: (415) 308-0833 Fx: (650) 993-8574

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