

Things You Should Know About Ankle Injuries

By Mike Farmer, Physical Therapist

Most ankle injuries are the result of “rolling over” the outside of the ankle. The ligaments can be stretched or torn and the treatment depends on the extent of the damage.

When an ankle injury occurs, the immediate treatment should always include:

Rest – Ice – Compression – Elevation (or RICE) until you have seen a health care professional. Then you may be placed in a splint or ankle brace, with or without crutches.

The best early treatment is rest. You need to stop running or exercising for a week or so. Using the RICE concept, ice the point of tenderness a couple of times a day for 10 minutes. Wear some type of compression support like the neoprene sleeve with parallel buttresses for compression of the soft tissue on each side of the shinbone.

Today the emphasis is on early protective movement and at the same time, preventing motion in the direction of the injury. The air cast ankle brace is often used in the initial phase of the injury due to its ability to provide two of the essential components of immediate care – compression and protection. You can continue to move the foot up and down, but not in and out.

Once the pain has disappeared, your health care professional will instruct you to rehabilitate the ankle.

With rehabilitation, the key words are “stretching and strengthening.” Stretching the calf muscles and strengthening the muscles that control ankle movements are important to rehabilitation programs and reducing the risk of another injury.

To strengthen and stretch the ankle and calf muscles, consider the following exercises:



Dorsiflexion

For this exercise you'll need a Theraband or Theratubing resistance cord. These can be picked up from a sports medicine or rehab professional or online. Sit with your knee straight and your foot pointed down. Place a loop in the tubing and hang it over your toes. Tie the other end to a fixed object like a chair leg. Scoot back until the band has slight tension. Flex the foot back and toward you at a fairly even pace. Do three sets to fatigue twice a day. That is – do one set until you feel like your muscle is tired. Rest for a minute. Then do a second set. Repeat a third set the same way.



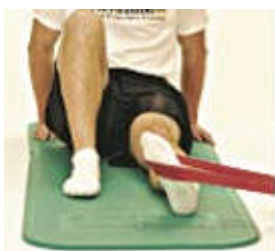
Plantarflexion

Using the same method and position as above, push the foot down toward the ground. Repeat as described previously.



Eversion

Using the same method and position as above, flex the foot up and to the outside like you are pulling your little toe toward your hip. Repeat as described previously.



Inversion

Using the same method and position as above, flex the foot up and to the inside like you are pulling your little toe toward the opposite knee. Repeat as described previously.

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Heel Raises

Stand with your feet parallel and the front half of your foot on a 2-inch board. Keep your knees straight and simply raise your heels off the ground. Repeat as above.

Toe Raises

Stand with your heels on the same board and your toes on the floor. Raise your forefoot off the ground as far as possible. Repeat as above.

You should do these exercises once or twice daily for at least one week prior to your beginning to be active.

Most people feel better when they have additional protection on their injured ankle. This is where an ankle support is useful. Whether it is tape or a manufactured brace, the principle is the same. You need to reduce the chance of "rolling over" on the ankle. Taping the ankle is effective, but is short on duration and you need a trainer to properly apply it. Also, tape tends to lose its strength when you perspire and therefore you have a reduction in the amount of protection you are getting. The solution is a commercially available support that not only fits your needs, but also closely duplicates the taping configuration trainer uses when taping an ankle. It must be easy to put on, comfortable and most importantly, meets your needs. We recommend the ASO Ankle Brace for ankle support.

REMEMBER! An ankle support without proper rehabilitation will not give you the protection you need. The support works best when combined with exercise and stretching.