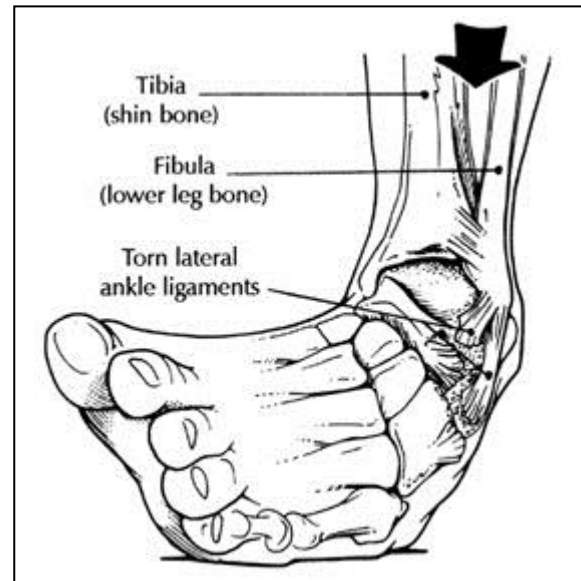


Ankle Sprain

What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain involves stretching and/or tearing of one or more ligaments in the ankle. This normally happens with a twisting/rolling motion (shown in the picture). The ligaments are short bands of tough, flexible fibrous connective tissue which hold the bones together. A sprain on the outside of the ankle is the most common (which we discuss in this leaflet) but you can also have an inside ankle sprain or even a high ankle sprain depending on the way your ankle twists when injured.



Some sprains are worse than others. However, the treatment is similar for a minor and major sprain, but a major sprain will take longer to get better.

What are the symptoms of ankle sprain?

Symptoms will depend on the severity.

You are likely to experience pain, swelling and after a few days may develop bruising. Initially it will be difficult to bear weight on the ankle, so standing and walking may be painful.

If the ankle is deformed, there is severe pain directly on the bone or you cannot put any weight on the ankle and walk four steps, then you may require an X-ray to check for a fracture.

What should I do if I sprain my ankle?

Progression 1: You need to use “RICE” and very gentle movement exercises.

Rest: This will allow your ligaments to heal without being disrupted - DO NOT continue to run on your ankle and avoid walking long distances.

- Try to stand and walk short distances e.g. around the house

Ice: This is a good treatment for inflammation and should be applied as soon as possible.

- Ice helps remove excess heat, decrease swelling and reduce pain
- Apply up to 5 times a day for 15-20 minutes. – When applying ice, always cover with a small towel or pillow case and do not apply directly to skin to avoid ice burn

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Compression: Use of an elastic wrap or bandage can provide support and help reduce swelling.

- DO NOT compress too tightly as this could restrict the blood flow to your foot. If your toes change colour or you start to get pins & needles or numbness in your foot, you should remove the compression.

Elevation:

- Keeping the injured ankle elevated will help the body reabsorb the extra fluid caused by swelling.

- Sit with the back of your calf propped up on pillows / cushion.

- Ideally the ankle should be at the level of your heart, but at least higher than your hip.

- DO NOT use any compression while your foot is up as this could restrict the blood flow to the foot.

If it is a severe sprain then you may need a boot or elbow crutches to take weight off of the ankle to allow it to rest. However, the majority of sprains will not require this and this should only be used short term unless instructed otherwise.

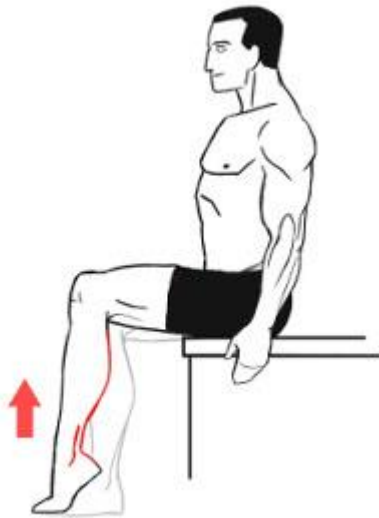
In the first week you should aim to keep the ankle moving gently as follows, move your ankle up and down and circle it round both ways little and often throughout the day.



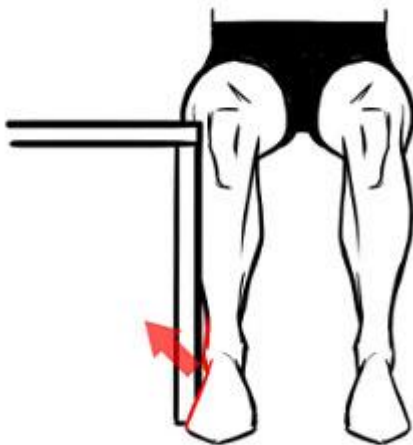
Ankle Sprain

Progression 2:

Once the initial inflammation is under control you can do exercises to help speed up the recovery process. You must start with gentle exercises as if you do too much too early then you may disrupt the healing of the ligaments. The following are exercises that you can start to practice week two:



Sitting down raise your heels pushing up onto your tip toes. Move slowly squeezing your calf muscles. Start with 10-15 reps and 3 sets but as time goes on and it gets easier, increase to doing X30 in a row without stopping.



Sitting with your foot against something sturdy. Try pushing your foot out to the side gently. There should be no movement, just tension. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat 10 times. As it gets easier, start to push harder or hold for longer.

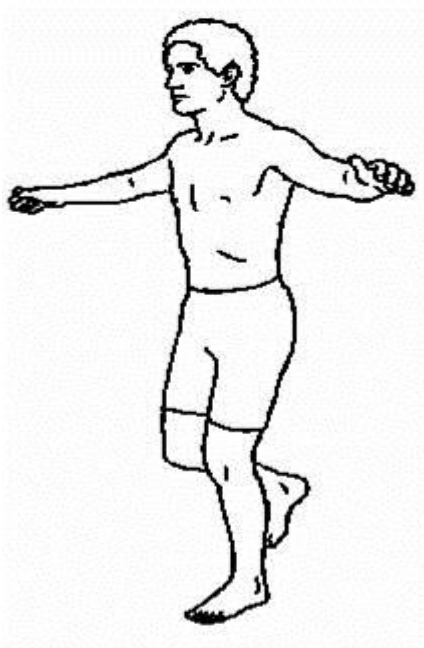
Ankle Sprain

Progression 3:

As the pain reduces you can GRADUALLY start to increase your walking and other weight bearing activities. At this point you can start to add balance exercises. These are important to prevent re-injury of the ligament.



Stand beside something sturdy that you can hold onto if you lose your balance, put one foot in front of the other imagining you are on a tight rope. Gradually progress how long you can hold it for, little and often throughout the day.



Stand beside a wall or something sturdy that you can hold onto if you lose your balance, lift your good leg up off of the floor and try maintaining your balance on the affected leg. Gradually progress how long you can hold it for. To make it harder, practice closing your eyes or stand on a cushion to make it uneven. If you could not stand on one leg prior to your injury then complete the exercise below.

Ankle Sprain

Progression 4:

By this stage the ligaments should be healing, the pain and swelling should be subsiding and your walking should be improving. If this is the case, you can now gradually introduce more challenging exercises as below. If it is only a minor strain you may not get to this stage. If you are returning to sport I recommend these exercises and a gradual return.

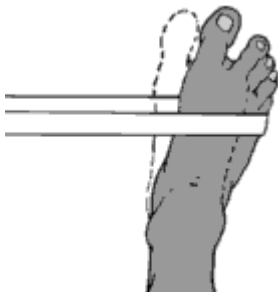


HEEL RAISES

Stand up holding onto something sturdy for balance. Rise up onto your tip toes as shown in the picture. Slowly lower your heels back down. Start with 10-15 reps and 3-4 sets; gradually increase depending on your pain. If pain increases then reduce the reps and sets that you do.



Progress onto one leg when you find it easy on two legs



You can also complete resistance band exercises. Try buying a light resistance band to start with. Move your ankle out against the resistance of the band. Make sure you are not moving your knee or hip to help the movement.

10-15 reps X3-4 sets

Ankle Sprain

If you have followed the information and advice in this leaflet and your symptoms are not improving or if they start to worsen it is important you speak to a medical professional.

Last Updated: August 2018

For review: August 2020
