

Key points to remember

- In the first few days after injury avoid H.A.R.M (Heat, Alcohol, Running or any other exercise and Massage).
- Use Protection, Optimal Loading, Ice, Compression and Elevation as described (P.O.L.I.C.E).
- Start to put weight on ankle and try to walk with a normal walking pattern as soon as possible.
- Start the exercises listed as soon as possible.

Do not suddenly return to sport, instead gradually building up your activities before return to training. You must be comfortable walking/brisk walking before you attempt to progress. Before returning to training you should also be confident trying “walk-jogs” before progressing to jogging, running backwards, sideways, running with gentle/sharp twists and turns, running at pace, jumping, landing and hopping.

Return to the Emergency Department if you notice ANY of the following

- Pain not progressing/worsening by 10 days post injury.
- Unable to weight-bear
- Persistent/worsening ankle instability.

Further on-line information which may be useful:

- NICE - guidelines on sprains and strains
- NHS - Sprains and strains
- Sprained Ankle - Health Information - BUPA
- Arthritis Research UK - Ankle Sprain Information and Exercise Sheet.

Ankle Sprain : An Information Guide For Patients



What is an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains are one of the most commonly seen injuries in an Emergency Department. They occur when the foot is taken into a position which is beyond its normal limits. When this occurs it is often the ligaments around the ankle, which are designed to hold the bones together, that are stretched and damaged.

Ankle sprain usually occurs when the foot rolls onto its outer border. This is shown in Figure 1. The ligaments on the outside of your ankle (lateral ligaments) are most often injured. Occasionally your foot can roll in the opposite direction injuring the inner ligaments of the ankle.

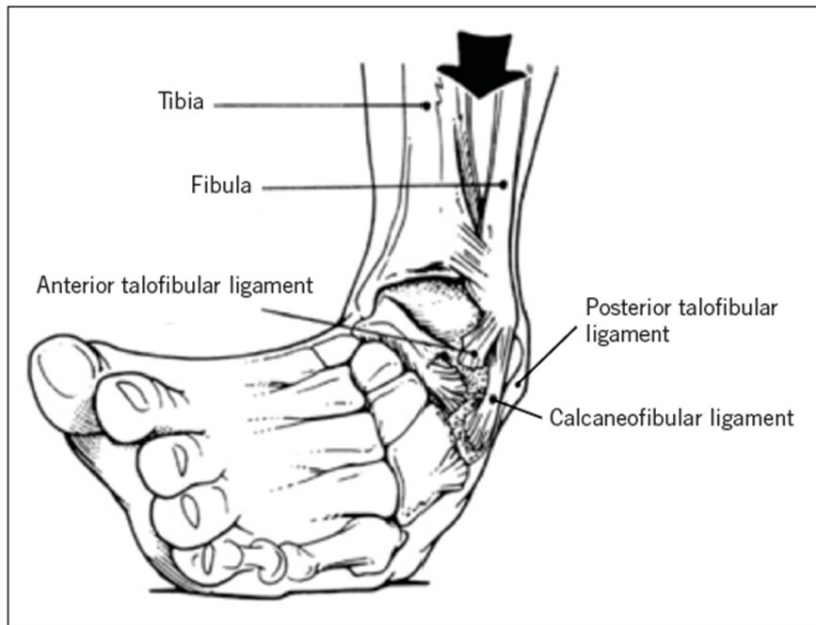


Figure 1

Exercises Continued



- (4) In lying with knee straight, wrap a towel or dressing gown cord around foot and gently draw foot towards you—hold x 20 seconds and repeat x 3.

(exercises 5-7 should only be commenced as your ankle progresses)



- (5) Hold onto wall and move onto toes and heels x 10 times.



- (6) Leaning against wall, injured foot behind and flat on floor, allow your weight to move onto front leg keeping back foot flat on floor to feel a stretch in your calf which you hold for 20 seconds. This should not be pushed into pain. Repeat x 3 times.



- (7) Try to restore your balance by single leg standing on the affected leg. Use the support of a wall to assist you initially. Aim for 1 min x 2

Simple exercises to assist your recovery. Try to repeat these at least 3 times daily for up to 6 weeks after injury. Slight discomfort may be noted but these exercises should be stopped if severe pain is being experienced.



(1) In sitting with knee bent, try and make the letters of the alphabet with your foot. (A-Z) x 2.



(2) In sitting with feet on floor—roll onto your toes so your heels lift and then roll onto heels so toes lift x 10.

(3) Using the resistance of your hand try and strengthen the ankle by trying to move it against light resistance upwards, downwards, inwards and outwards. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat x 10 times.



How bad is my ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains are graded on their severity. A minor ankle sprain will take up to 6 weeks to heal, while recovery for a high grade sprain is much longer.

What are the symptoms of an ankle sprain?

As a result of an ankle sprain you find some of the signs and symptoms listed below. More severe sprains may find more of these symptoms are present and that they persist for longer.

Pain—most often felt at outside of ankle, but you can also notice pain in other areas of the ankle.

Heat—this is usually a result of inflammation which is the first stage of the body trying to repair itself.

Bruising—this is usually noted in more severe injuries. Bruising tends to appear after a few days and is usually blue or purple initially fading to yellow and disappearing with time.

Feeling of instability at the ankle—this is because the ligaments that stabilise the ankle have been stretched or torn, and the body has not repaired itself enough or learned to adjust to this.

Restriction of movement—this is usually a side-effect of swelling and pain.

Difficulty walking—a painful, stiff and swollen ankle can make it hard to walk normally especially in the first few days after injury.

What will help my ankle in the early stages after Injury?

The initial management of soft tissue injuries is Protection. Optimal Loading. Ice. Compression and Elevation. (P.O.L.I.C.E)

Protection means trying to prevent further injury to the area and can take the form of protective strapping often worn for up to 5 days after injury. Other forms of protection less commonly used include Braces/Boots/Tubigrip.

Optimal loading means gradually progressing your ability to walk as pain allows. Taking weight through your injured ankle as early as possible is encouraged and elbow crutches can be used to help this. Regular walking over short distances can also prevent stiffness of the ankle. Progression off crutches is done as pain reduces and movement improves.

Ice—e.g. application of a bag of ice/bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel. ICE SHOULD NEVER BE APPLIED DIRECTLY TO THE SKIN. This can help with swelling and with pain relief. It should be applied to the ankle for 10 minutes. Take off for 2 minutes. Then reapply for a further 10 minutes. Continue with this every 2-3 hours for the first 3 days, thereafter apply if significant swelling/pain is noted.

Compression—can also help with swelling. Ankle strapping can provide some compression as does elasticated tubular bandage (tubigrip). Tubigrip can also be used to replace ankle strapping on its removal after 5 days.

TUBIGRIP SHOULD ALWAYS BE REMOVED WHEN GOING TO BED.

Elevation for short periods in the first 72 hours after injury i.e. lying on your back with pillows under foot so your foot is above your knee, and knee is above hip level. This can assist in the drainage of swelling, it can be useful to combine elevation of the leg during ice application. Some people find it useful to elevate the limb on going to bed.

Other tips to assist your recovery:

Avoid H.A.R.M. (heat/alcohol/running or any other significant exercise/ Massage) for the first 3 days after injury. These can worsen your swelling and pain at this early stage of your recovery.

Pain relief—“over the counter” painkillers can assist your ankle pain and help you try to get your ankle moving and to assist your walking. Anti-inflammatory medication can also be helpful and offers most value if started from 3 days after injury. Your local pharmacist can discuss these options with you. If longer term pain relief is required, you may need to discuss this with your GP.

Walking—the goal after ankle sprain is to have you taking weight on your injured limb as soon as possible. Crutches may be required in the earlier stages after injury. To help with your walking you should use footwear e.g. trainers. A normal walking pattern may be hard to achieve initially, but as you recover it is important to follow a normal walking pattern. *This means allowing the foot to contact the floor with the heel first—then taking your weight through the whole foot and then rolling onto the toes.* Try to avoid walking solely on your toes or by favouring the inside or outside of the foot—these will add to pain-levels and slow your recovery.

Recovery—the most important thing for you to know is that most ankle sprains heal well, and with simple self-care advice good improvement can be noted within a few weeks. For the higher grade injuries full recovery may take a few months and physiotherapy is often required. The exercises outlined overleaf will assist your recovery and may help to reduce the risk of re-injury.