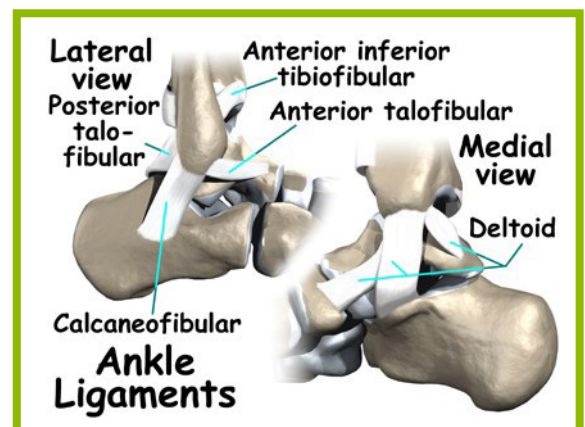


Physio Med Self Help For Ankle Problems

An ankle sprain is a common injury and usually results when the ankle is twisted, or when you roll on to the outside of the foot (inversion). The term sprain signifies injury to the soft tissues, usually the ligaments of the ankle. They are often characterised by pain in the ligament, swelling of the area, feeling warm to the touch and possibly some bruising or discoloration around the area. There is much that can be done to both speed up the healing and prevent re-occurrence.

Anatomy Of The Area

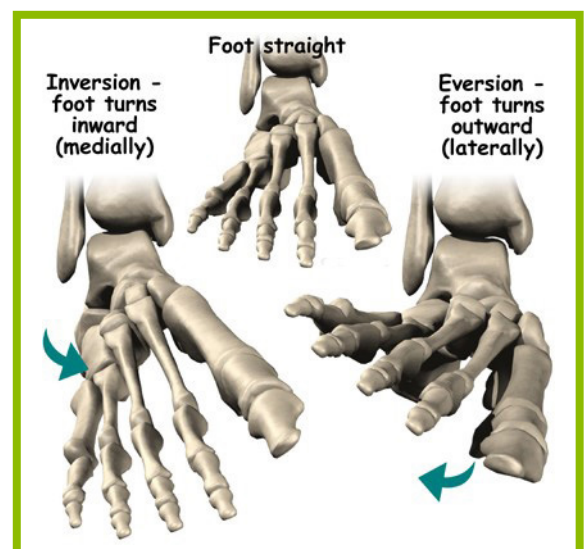
Ligaments on both sides of the ankle joint help hold the bones together. Three ligaments make up the lateral ligament complex on the side of the ankle farthest from the other ankle. (Lateral means further away from the centre of the body.) These include the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL), the calcaneofibular ligament (CFL), and the posterior talofibular ligament (PTFL). A thick ligament, called the deltoid ligament, supports the medial ankle (the side closest to your other ankle).



The ligaments also help to limit movement at the ankle, providing stability. Such movements are shown below.

Potential Causes Of A Sprained Ankle And Advice To Prevent It

- Poor foot control – flat feet or feet rolling inwards causes increased twisting strain on the ligaments
 - » If you feel that this is an issue for you please visit your GP, Chartered Physiotherapist or Podiatrist to receive an expert opinion and appropriate intervention.
- Calf tightness and reduced range of movement at the ankle
 - » If this is a problem, ensure adequate length of the calf muscles and a good range of movement at the ankle by undertaking a regular stretching programme



- Poor balance is a good predictor of future ankle sprains
 - » Balance training will help retrain the local balance receptors in the ankle ligaments
- Poor footwear - unstable or not fit for the activity undertaken
 - » Wear suitable shoes for the activity (type, fit and condition of footwear)
- Unstable or uneven floor / surface
 - » Take note of the floor / surface and take extra care if unstable, uneven or slippery (this is especially true of wet weather / conditions which may change a surfaces characteristics)

Signs And Symptoms Of A Sprained Ankle

Acute Injury

PAIN

When injury occurs, the nerves are more sensitive due to the inflammatory chemicals that are released. The joint hurts and may throb. The pain usually worsens when the damaged area is pressed or the foot moves in certain directions (depending upon which ligament is involved) and during walking, standing or wearing high heels.

SWELLING

This occurs due to increased fluid in the tissue and can sometimes be severe.

BRUISING / DISCOLOURATION

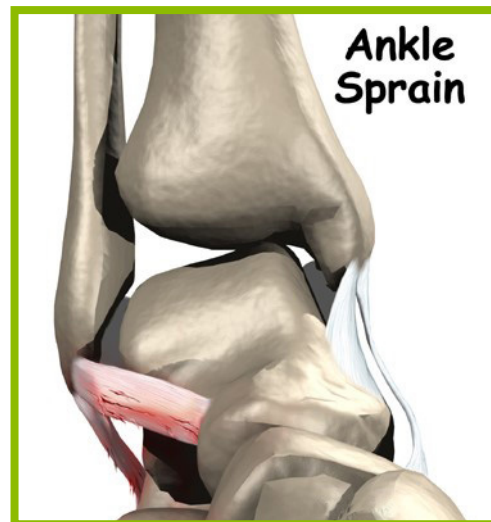
This can occur near the site of injury or travel (due to gravity) towards the foot and underside of the foot. Its presence is determined by the severity of the sprain. It is due to the rupture of small blood vessels when the soft tissue has torn.

REDNESS/WARMTH

This is caused by increased blood flow to the area; the increase in blood flow is needed to help with the healing process.

Chronic / Episodic Condition

People who have sprained an ankle often end up spraining the ankle again. If the ankle keeps turning in with activity, the condition is called ankle instability. Patients who have ankle instability lose confidence in their ankle to support them, especially on uneven ground. They often have swelling around the ankle that doesn't go away. Pain and swelling in a joint can cause a reflex where the body turns off the muscles around the joint. This can cause times when the ankle feels like it is going to give way, meaning it may have a tendency to twist again very easily. This is avoidable and reversible by undertaking balance retraining! People who have had several mild ankle sprains or one severe sprain are prone to impingement problems in the ankle. The ligaments that were sprained may become irritated and thickened, causing them to get pinched near the edge of the ankle joint.



Aiding Recovery With A Home Treatment Programme

FIRST AID ADVICE (IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INJURY)

The best results after an ankle sprain come when treatment is started right away. A simple way to remember the essential steps of initial treatment is by the letters in the word RICE. These stand for rest, ice, compression, and elevation

REST

The injured tissues in the ankle need time to heal. Rest prevents further injury and reduces the stress on already inflamed tissues. If the injury is severe crutches or a walking stick (placed in the opposite hand to the injury) will prevent too much weight being placed on the ankle in the early days of injury when walking is essential.

ICE

Applying ice will reduce the blood flow to the injured area, it will help ease pain and reduce the swelling and warmth. You should apply the ice as soon after the injury as you can to prevent as much of the inflammation developing as possible. This will help ensure a speedy recovery. It is advised to apply ice in the form of crushed ice cubes, frozen peas or an ice pack. DO NOT apply directly to your skin, oil can be applied to protect the area. All of these are to be wrapped in a damp tea towel and applied to the ankle for approximately 15 minutes every 2 hours. It is advised that you check the skin every 5 minutes to avoid the possibility of an ice burn from the cold temperature. Apply frequently in the first 2 days.

COMPRESSION

Use tubigrip (elasticated tubular bandage available at the chemist) on your ankle, this will help prevent inflammation and swelling. It should be placed from the base of your toes and extend a third of the way up your shin. Make sure it is not too tight and take it off at night time.

ELEVATION

supporting your ankle above the level of your heart helps to control swelling by aiding your body to reabsorb the fluid that has leaked into the tissue. Ideally lie on your bed or the sofa or floor and prop your ankle up on pillows or a chair so that it is higher than your heart. Even propping your ankle up on a chair if you are unable to lie down (e.g. at work) is beneficial.

FURTHER SELF HELP

- If swelling in the ankle is severe, self-massage can help. Apply massage strokes from the ankle toward the knee with your leg kept in an elevated position. This helps get the excess tissue fluid moving out of the ankle and back into circulation.
- Mild pain relievers may help with the discomfort. Anti-inflammatory medications can help ease pain and swelling and get people back to activity sooner after an ankle sprain. These medications include common over the counter drugs such as ibuprofen. Talk to your Doctor or Pharmacist if you have specific questions about which pain reliever is right for you.

RANGE OF MOVEMENT AND STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

Please discuss with your Physiotherapist which exercises are right for you. The type, duration and frequency of the exercises will depend on the structure and grade of your injury and where you are in the recovery phase.

BALANCE EXERCISES

Small nerve sensors inside the ligament are injured when a ligament is stretched or torn. These nerve sensors give your brain information about the position of your joints, a sensation called proprioception or position sense. For example, nerve sensors in your arm and hand give you the ability to touch your nose when your eyes are closed. The ligaments in the ankle work the same way. They send information to your nervous system to alert you about the position of your ankle joint – essential for balance. They work in addition to our eyes and our inner ears.

Proprioception (balance) exercises can help you recover more quickly from an ankle sprain and should actually be performed as part of a prevention programme. Poor balance is a good predictor of future ankle sprains. After an ankle injury, balance training is essential to recovery.

Please discuss with your Physiotherapist which exercises are right for you. The type, duration and frequency of the exercises will depend on the structure and grade of your injury and where you are in the recovery phase.

Please remember to use this advice under the guidance of your Physiotherapist.

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