

Steps to a Healthy Ankle

When You Injure an Ankle

Athletes from almost all types of sports may suffer an ankle injury at one time or another. Ankle injuries are one of the most common injuries found in athletics. Often these injuries tend to be mistreated. They may become an injury that takes a long time to heal.

Athletes are not the only ones to suffer ankle injuries, however. Women wearing high-heeled shoes, children playing, dancers turning or jumping, men lifting or climbing may all experience this injury.

When we say a person sprained an ankle, we mean that the ligaments and tendons around the ankle bone tear away a little, or completely, but the bone does not break.

The most common ankle sprain we see is one in which the person has twisted over on the outside of the ankle. The three ligaments, or sinewy, supports which fanned out from the ankle bone down into the foot are injured and torn away.

How your treatment starts and is continued, what kind of action and what kind of energy it takes, all affects how quickly the sprain will heal. Here's how we will work to solve your ankle problems. First, remember that the most important thing to do for an ankle sprain is to prevent swelling. To do this, there is an easy catchword to remember: **I.C.E.**

These letters stand for **ice, compression and elevation**. Actually, the three forms of care are good for any immediate injury.

Ice is used to prevent swelling. Apply an ice pack to the ankle for 20 minutes per hour for 3-4 hours straight. If you have trouble keeping the ice pack on, simply take any elastic or ace wrap and put one layer over your skin. Then apply the ice pack and loosely wrap the rest of the ace wrap around the ice pack to hold it in place.

3 Method of Ice Therapy

Remember, ice is used to prevent swelling. You may use any one of these 3 methods after getting injured or to promote healing and comfort following foot surgery.

Frozen Cups:

Take 6 small paper or Styrofoam drinking cups and fill within 1 inch of the top with tap water. Place in the freezer until solid. When ready to use, take out 1 cup. Tear away 1 inch of the paper from the top. Holding the bottom of the cup, rub the ice onto the injured part. Cups that are 3-6 oz. are easier to handle. Keep rubbing, using circular motions for about 10 minutes. Repeat the procedure to 2-3 times per day or after every workout. Hint: a small hand towel will catch the excess water drops.

Cold Ace Wraps:

Instead of using an ice pack, some people like to keep 2-3 ace wraps in a pail of water in the

refrigerator (you can buy ace wraps at any drugstore). Their advantage is that they can be reused.

When you're ready, take the ace wrap out of the bucket. Wring out the extra water. Making sure the bandage is smooth and flat, wrap it around the injured part. Keep the wrap on for 20 minutes, then unwrap. Put the ace wrap back into the bucket for use the next time. Perform this 2-3 times a day or after every workout.

To wrap an ankle, start at about the middle of the foot and work your way up to about 2 inches above the ankle bone. Flex your foot so that your toes are pointing up when you begin wrapping.

Some other methods of ice therapy can be found after the steps to a healthy ankle chart.

Contrast Baths (Can be used 48 hrs after injury):

A contrast bath is used to make the blood flow faster to an injury. After swelling is under control, the doctor will ask you to perform the baths 2 times a day. Here's how: Use 2 medium pails or tubs of water. Put cool tapwater with 10-12 ice cubes in the first bucket. Put warm (but not hot) water into the second bucket.

Now you are ready for the contrasting. The formula is 1:4, 1:3, 1:2, 1:1. That means that you put your foot into the cold bucket for 1 minute, then immediately put it in the warm bucket for 4 minutes. Next, go back to the cool bucket for 1 minute, then the warm bucket for 3 minutes. Keep this method up until no time is left. An easy way to remember this is that your foot goes into the warm water for 1 minute less each time. End the process with the cold water.

You may have an unpleasant tingling sensation at first, but this will go away. While your foot is in the warm water, you can do some range of motion exercises to help your ankle and foot easier.

How about compression?

To compress means to squeeze or restrict with pressure. An ace bandage, a soft cast called a Nunavut or even a hard plaster cast may be needed to keep down the swelling.



Elevate waist high or higher

Last, the ankle must be raised, or elevated, higher than your heart level. This means that if you are lying down, your foot should be placed on a few pillows or books to get it higher than the rest of your body. The more you elevate your foot, the better chance you have of keeping the blood and fluids of your body from pooling in your foot. When they do, they make the ankle swell.

Steps to a Healthy Ankle:

Now that you know the general rules of caring for an ankle injury, you are probably anxious to know what is going to happen in your own case. Your treatment must be tailored just for you. This is where teamwork between you and your doctor is important. Each person heals differently. Your progress depends not only on knowing if there are any changes in the pain or discomfort you're having, but on not doing any task that brings on pain.

Pain is your body's way of telling you to slow down. For an ankle injury, this means that if you cannot put your full weight on your foot without pain, you should not try to walk on it.

The chart below will give you a roadmap to your journey back to good health. The top of the chart shows the steps your ankle goes through to heal. The left side of the chart shows what type of care you need to give your ankle to help it get well.

Steps to a Healthy Ankle

	Injury	Swelling Goes Down	Pain-free Walking	No swelling	¾ strength	Full strength
ICE	✓	✓	✓			
Elevation	✓	✓	✓			
Compression	✓	✓	✓			
Crutches	✓					
Contrast Bath		✓	✓			
Exercises		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Walk Fast					✓	✓
Run						✓
Drills						✓

Manual Resistance Exercises

Along with the range of motion exercises you can do manual resistance exercises. These exercises will help your ankle get stronger. The following will show you how these manual resistance exercises work.

You can buy an exercise band or elastic bungee cord at an athletic store. Follow these instructions once a day and rub ice over the injury if your ankle hurts when you have finished the exercises.

During this time, you may walk as much as you'd like, as long as you do not have pain. **Any**

elastic wrap may give your ankle support and prevent swelling.

Knowing when and where to increase or get back to your normal schedule is something only your body can tell you, but teamwork with your doctor will make that time go smoother.

Fig. 2. Resistance band ankle strengthening exercises



When May I Return to.....?

Fill in the blank: running, tennis, walking, aerobics, dancing. You can answer this question yourself.

- First, stand up on the toes of your good foot. Try to balance only on this foot for 20 seconds. Now, do the same on the injured foot. You should be able to last the same time.
- Second, go up on the toes of the injured foot. Try to hop up and down 10 times without letting your heel touch the floor. If you can do this, you are ready to start running.
- For the first few runs, go to a track. This is important so that you may accurately tell how far you have run and can follow a system. Here is the system: run the straight sides of the track and walk the curves. Add one curve to the run. After a few times, add the second curve if there is no pain on the straight runs.
- Take your time, both in adding more running and in the speed you run. It will harm your ankle more to run too much and with pain than it did to injure it in the first place.
- Do not get discouraged: it will take time. It takes longer to get well than it did to get hurt.