

## The Grumbling Ankle

Sprained ankles are a very common injury that usually occur as a result of a quick change in direction or due to uneven surfaces. If the sprain is mild, then initially it usually improves with rest, ice, compression and elevation. However, some athletes complain that even a few weeks later they are still experiencing some mild symptoms such as swelling, pain and calf tightness that just doesn't improve. This is because after a sprain, ankles need to be adequately rehabbed to ensure that the range of motion (ROM), strength and proprioception (balance) are all working together. This is important to avoid further ankle injuries in the future.

The most common type of ankle sprain is an "inversion injury" (when the ankle is rolled outwards), which usually results in injury to the anterior talofibular (ATFL) and calcaneofibular (CFL) ligaments. Ankle sprains range in severity and if in doubt, should be assessed by a Doctor or physio to assess whether an x-ray is needed.

When the ankle has settled from the original injury it is then necessary to start rehab. Some examples of ankle rehab include...

1) Restoring ROM. A common exercise to increase ROM is to "write the alphabet" in the air using the ankle joint only. This exercise challenges the athlete to use the full range of their ankle joint and reduces stiffness. It is also very good in the early stages of rehab to help reduce swelling.

Improving calf flexibility will also improve ankle ROM. Simple calf stretching and rolling will assist with this.

2) Increase the strength of the ankle. The best way to do this is doing calf raises until fatigue. If they are painful then start with double leg calf raises and progress to single leg when the ankle gets stronger. You can do both bent and straight leg calf raises to help maximize ankle strength.



3) Improve proprioception. This will retrain your ankle stability and is very important for athletes running on uneven surfaces, such as trail runners. A simple way to start retraining proprioception is by standing on leg with your eyes closed and try and hold it for as long as possible. You can progress this to standing on wobble boards or dura discs for a further challenge.



When returning to training it can also be useful initially to tape up the ankle to give extra support physically. Some athletes also find that the tape helps them psychologically and therefore they are able to train better.

Overall, inversion injuries to ankles are very common throughout all sports. It is important to rehab them to avoid further injury to the ankle and therefore less training time is lost!

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