



Sprained Ankle: Rehabilitation Exercises

Introduction

Ankle sprains are common injuries that can result in lifelong problems. Some people with repeated or severe sprains can develop long-term joint pain and weakness. Treating a sprained ankle can help prevent ongoing ankle problems.

Rehabilitation (rehab) exercises are critical to ensure that the ankle heals completely and reinjures do not occur.

- You can begin healing by walking or bearing some weight, while using crutches if needed, if you can do so without too much pain.
- Start rehab with range-of-motion exercises in the first 72 hours after your injury. Continue with further rehab, including stretching, strength training, and balance exercises, over the next several weeks to months.
- You can do rehab exercises at home or even at the office to strengthen your ankle.

How to do rehabilitation exercises for an ankle sprain

Start each exercise slowly and use your pain level to guide you in doing these exercises. Ease off the exercise if you have more than mild pain. Following are some examples of typical rehabilitation (rehab) exercises.

Keep in mind that the timing and type of rehab exercises recommended for you may vary according to your doctor's or physical therapist's preferences.

Range-of-motion exercises

Range-of-motion exercises begin right after your injury. Try doing these exercises then putting ice on your ankle, up to 5 times a day. These are easy to do while you are at a desk or watching TV.

Try the following simple range-of-motion exercises:

- Trace the alphabet with your toe, which encourages ankle movement in all directions. Trace the alphabet 1 to 3 times.
- Sit in a chair with your foot flat on the floor. Slowly move your knee side to side while keeping your foot pressed flat. Continue for 2 to 3 minutes.

Towel curls. While sitting, place your foot on a towel on the floor and scrunch the towel toward you with your toes. Then, also using your toes, push the towel away from you. Make this exercise more challenging by placing a weighted object, such as a soup can, on the other end of the towel.



Stretching exercises

Start exercises to stretch your Achilles tendon as soon as you can do so without pain. The Achilles tendon connects the calf muscles on the back of the lower leg to the bone at the base of the heel. Try the towel stretch if you need to sit down, or try the calf stretch if you can stand.

- **Towel stretch.** Sit with your leg straight in front of you. Place a rolled towel under the ball of your foot, holding the towel at both ends. Gently pull the towel toward you while keeping your knee straight. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds, and repeat 2 to 4 times. In moderate to severe ankle sprains, it may be too painful at first to pull your toes far enough to feel a stretch in your calf. Use caution, and let pain be your guide.
- **Calf stretch.** Stand facing a wall with your hands on the wall at about eye level. Put the leg you want to stretch about a step behind your other leg. Keeping your back heel on the floor, bend your front knee until you feel a stretch in the back leg. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times. Repeat the exercise with the back knee bent a little, still keeping your back heel on the floor. This will stretch a different part of the calf muscles.

Strengthening exercises

Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about the timing of strengthening exercises for the ankle. Typically you can start them when you are able to stand without increased pain or swelling.

Do 8 to 12 repetitions of these exercises once or twice daily for 2 to 4 weeks, depending on the severity of your injury.

- Start by sitting with your foot flat on the floor and pushing it outward against an immovable object such as the wall or heavy furniture. Hold for about 6 seconds, then relax. After you feel comfortable with this, try using rubber tubing looped around the outside of your feet for resistance. Push your foot out to the side against the tubing, then count to 10 as you slowly bring your foot back to the middle.
- While still sitting, put your feet together flat on the floor. Press your injured foot inward against your other foot. Hold for about 6 seconds, then relax.
- Next, place the heel of your other foot on top of the injured one. Push down with the top heel while trying to push up with your injured foot. Hold for about 6 seconds, then relax.



Balance and control exercises

You can usually start balance and control exercises when you are able to stand without pain. But talk to your doctor or physical therapist about the exact timing. Also, don't try these exercises if you could not have done them easily before your injury. If you think you would have felt unsteady doing these exercises when your ankle was healthy, you are at risk of falling when you try them with an injured ankle.

Practice your balance exercise at least once a day, repeating it about 6 times in each session.

1. Stand on just your injured foot while holding your arms out to your sides with your eyes open. If you feel unsteady, stand in a doorway so you can put your hands on the door frame to help you. Balance for as long as you can, working up to 60 seconds. When you can do this for 60 seconds, try exercise number 2.
2. Stand on your injured foot only and hold your arms across your chest with your eyes open. When you can do this for 60 seconds, try exercise number 3.
3. Stand on your injured foot only, hold your arms out to the sides, and close your eyes. If you feel unsteady, stand in a doorway so you can put your hands on the door frame to help you. When you can do this for 60 seconds, try exercise number 4.
4. Stand on your injured foot only, hold your arms across your chest, and close your eyes. Balance for as long as you can, working up to 60 seconds.

Stretching exercises should be continued on a daily basis and especially before and after physical activities to help prevent reinjures. Even after your ankle feels better, continue with strengthening exercises and balance and control exercises several times a week to keep your ankles strong.

Always call the office if you have any questions or concerns 772-589-3110.