
Ankle Pain

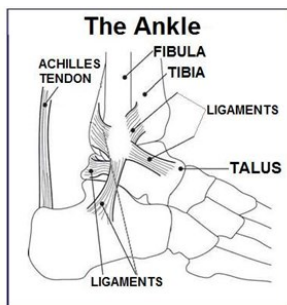
Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with some general advice about how to manage your ankle pain and some simple exercises to help you achieve this. You may be sent this leaflet while waiting for your physiotherapy appointment.

Ankle Pain

Ankle pain is a frequent complaint that affects people of all ages. Most ankle pain is not serious and does not require a scan or x-ray to diagnose the problem.

Muscle imbalances can be caused or made worse by problems in the foot itself for example a dropped arch in the foot commonly known as a 'flat foot'. (Pes Planus). Lack of foot arch support put stresses on the ankle joint. In most cases the outlook for a full recovery is good and by adopting some simple approaches the ankle will improve and get better.



The Ankle Joint

The ankle is made up of two joints: the true ankle joint and the subtalar ankle joint underneath.

The ankle joint consists of three bones held together by cartilage and ligaments. The cartilage which has a smooth, slippery surface allows the ends of the bones to move against each other without friction and helps with shock absorption, while the ligaments around the ankle provide stability to the joint.

The tibia forms the inside of the ankle joint. The fibula forms the outside of the ankle joint. The talus is the underneath part of the ankle joint. The ankle joint allows you to move your foot up and down.

The subtalar joint consists of two bones, the talus on top and calcaneus on the bottom. It allows you to move your foot from side to side.

The ankle muscles and joint capsule provide some support to the joint and allow it to move.

Conditions affecting the ankle

There are many different causes of ankle pain.

A common cause is Osteoarthritis which is a disease that affects the joint cartilage surfaces so it doesn't move as smoothly as it should. The condition is sometimes called degenerative joint disease or 'wear and tear'. The main symptoms are pain and sometimes stiffness, which are most likely to be felt at the front and sides of the ankle. (However, there are other forms of arthritis that affect the ankle, for example, Rheumatoid

Arthritis, where the joint may become hot, swollen and in constant pain. Rheumatoid Arthritis may affect multiple joints. If this is the case seek advice from your GP.)

Another common cause of pain to the ankle is a sprain to the joint. This is commonly caused by a traumatic event such as a slip or fall causing the ligaments to be stretched due to a sudden pull. Occasionally, a ligament may fully tear (rupture). A damaged ligament causes inflammation, swelling and bleeding (bruising) around the affected joint. Movement of the joint will be painful.

General Advice

Many of the problems above can be helped by addressing the factors below:

Excess weight

Being overweight or obese increases stress on your ankle joints. It can put you at increased risk of osteoarthritis.

Lack of muscle flexibility or strength

A lack of muscle flexibility or strength are among the common causes of ankle injuries as well as traumatic incidents because there is less support given to the ankle joint to absorb the stresses/strains exerted on it.

Unsupportive Footwear

Unsupportive footwear can cause excess strain to occur around the ankle joint which itself can cause pain over time.

Change activities that make your symptoms worse

By modifying your activity levels you can help settle symptoms, minimize the development of secondary joint stiffness & muscle weakness and maintain your function and mobility. Avoid standing and sitting for long periods with acute ankle sprains and arthritic joint flare ups. Try and pace your activity levels dividing your activity into manageable 'chunks'. This will help you to avoid exacerbating your condition.

How to Treat a Sprained Ankle

The first treatment is to calm the inflammation and control the swelling and pain. This can be managed with the R.I.C.E.P approach to treatment. A sprained ankle normally heals within 4-6 weeks.

Initially

R - Rest - Initial rest helps prevent further injury and enables the healing process to begin. For a few days (approx. 4-5 days) reduce the amount of walking you do and gently exercise your ankle regularly within pain limits to avoid stiffness. Avoid forceful and stressful activity such as running and jumping at this stage of your recovery.

I - Ice - Ice can help reduce the pain around the ankle. Use a damp cloth and a bag of frozen peas (which you can re-use several times by re-freezing but do not eat them after doing this) or some crushed ice cubes in a damp towel. Put the ice pack on your injured ankle for 10-15 minutes every couple of hours for the first few days after the injury, then use the ice pack 3 times a day until the swelling goes down.

C - Compression - Compression bandages can be useful at this acute stage to provide both support and provide compression to the swelling to help with the pain. They can be purchased over the counter from chemists and most supermarkets. Make sure you do not wear any form of compression device on your ankle at night.

E - Elevation - Try and keeping the injured ankle raised above the level of your hips for the first few days after injury. This helps to decrease the swelling and pain.

P - Painkillers - Painkillers such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen if taken regularly can help with your pain and allow you to move your ankle more easily. Get advice from a local pharmacist or your GP on what pain relief medication is appropriate for you to take given your general medical situation.

Rehabilitation and Recovery

Healing of ligaments normally takes approximately six weeks although everyone recovers from injuries at different rates.

Healing times are related to how severe your injury is and/or any other medical problems that you may have.

As your ankle starts to heal it is important that you begin a series of exercises to help get back the full functional use of your ankle by improving both its strength and flexibility. This will also reduce the risk of your ankle being re-injured with further sprains or becoming a chronic injury.

[Video](#)

Try to get a good night's sleep



Sleeping lets your body rest and go into healing overdrive. It's an opportunity for your inflammation, bruising and swelling to go down while you're not physically active. Sleeping with a pillow between your knees in a side-lying position with the painful joint upper most can prevent unnecessary stress on the joint.

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Exercises

The exercises below are a good place to start. They can be done regularly during the day:

Try to exercise about 3 times a day. Be guided by your pain. Stop these exercises if you feel they are making your symptoms worse. Start with 'low impact' (non-weight bearing e.g. sitting or lying on the floor, sofa or bed) and build up to weight-bearing exercises and functional activities e.g. walking.

[Video](#)

Ankle Pumps in Supine



Lie on your back with your legs straight.

Briskly bend and straighten your ankles as your pain allows.

Repeat 10 times.

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[Video](#)



Sitting with your foot on the floor.

Alternately raise the inner border of your foot (big toe) and then the outer border (little toe).

Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

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[Video](#)



Sitting or lying.

Rotate your ankle. Change directions.

Repeat 10 times.

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[Video](#)



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Stand in a walking position with the leg to be stretched straight behind you and the other leg bent in front of you. Take support from a wall or chair.

Lean your body forwards and down until you feel the stretching in the calf of the straight leg.

Hold for 20-30 seconds or as pain allows then relax. Stretch the other leg.

Repeat 3 times.

[Video](#)



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Stand in a walking position with the leg to be stretched behind you. Hold on to a support.

Bend the leg to be stretched and let the weight of your body stretch your calf without lifting the heel off the floor.

Hold for 20-30 seconds or as pain allows then relax. Stretch the other leg.

Repeat 3 times.

[Video](#)



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Sit.

Bend and straighten your ankles.

Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

[Video](#)



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Single-leg Standing

Balance on one leg.

Remember to stand tall, with weight evenly on your foot and toes pointing forwards.

Try to hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 10 times and then use the other leg.

When this exercise becomes easy progress to the exercise below.

[Video](#)



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Single-leg Standing on a Balance Pad/Old Pillow

Balance on one leg on a balance pad/pillow.

Remember to stand tall, with weight evenly distributed between forefoot and heel and toes pointing forwards.

Try to hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 10 times and then use the other leg.

You may feel some mild discomfort during these exercises but if you feel a significant increase in pain then stop doing that particular exercise (or adjust it) until you can seek advice from your physiotherapist.

If this advice sheet does not help your symptoms there are more resources available for you to look at on the TIMS website.

Most patients will improve within a six week period with this advice, however, should your ankle problem persist then contact TIMS on the number below.

For further information

Please email ghnt.newcastlegatesheadtims@nhs.net, ring on **0191 2138800** or visit our website at: www.tims.nhs.uk which provides online guidance and support on managing your musculoskeletal (MSK) condition effectively.

The NHS website also provides trusted online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare to help you manage your condition and/or inform your choices about your health: www.nhs.uk.

Useful links

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone **0800 032 02 02** or e-mail northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk.



Tyneside Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

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