



## **Advice Following Recent Ankle Injury**

This leaflet is designed to supplement the advice given by your GP or Physiotherapist. It is to help you deal with your present ankle injury and enable you to look after your ankle in the future. The information is written by Physiotherapists and based on the latest research.

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01335 230079

[www.dchs.nhs.uk](http://www.dchs.nhs.uk)

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## Ankle Facts

- Most ankle injuries involve a sprain of the soft tissues around the ankle usually the ligaments. Fractures are much less common, and might be suspected if you are unable to bear any weight through the foot a few hours after the injury.
- Injuries to the ankle occur commonly in everyday life. They happen during sporting activity, but also with relatively trivial accidents, such as stumbling or tripping on the pavement or stairs.
- Pain from such soft tissue injuries can be very severe, but it usually gets better if managed in the appropriate way. Persistent pain following such an injury is not always an indication of fracture.
- Swelling, and sometimes bruising, frequently develop around the ankle and foot in the first few days this is a normal response to injury.
- It is common for people to have recurrent sprains. This is partly because following an injury people do not do helpful exercises to strengthen the muscles around the ankle or re-educate balance and regain confidence in the ankle.
- This leaflet will advise you how to manage your sprain initially, and how to train the ankle to reduce the risk of recurrence. The exact period of recovery will depend upon the nature of the injury and how well you cope with and manage the recovery.
- Ankle injury management involves three stages:
  - STAGE 1 Period of **relative rest**: Day 0—Day 2
  - STAGE 2 **Non weight-bearing exercise** - as soon as you can. No later than day 2.
  - STAGE 3 Gradual **weight bearing exercises** - as soon as able (moderate discomfort is acceptable).

## Pain Relief Advice

**Anti-inflammatory tablets or painkillers may have been prescribed or alternatively can be purchased from your local pharmacy.**

**These will help with stiffness and pain but may not be suitable for all patients.  
Paracetamol may be a suitable alternative.**

**If in doubt you should consult your GP or pharmacist before taking any medication.**

**Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.**

Gradually progress these exercises over the three weeks. Do this by doing more of them, more regularly, and more vigorously as time goes by.

Doing regular strengthening and balance exercises will help to reduce the risk of recurrence.

By about three weeks it is likely your movements will be full and you will be walking normally.

However for a number of weeks you might find that your foot:

- Aches if you have been on your feet a lot.
- Is uncomfortable at the end of your movement range.
- Remains slightly swollen for a number of weeks, sometimes months.

Before returning to full sporting activity you should gradually build-up exercises. This may take a few weeks.

Ensure to practice any sport specific activities, gradually returning to training sessions then matches once you feel fully fit.

If you are involved in particularly vigorous sporting activity, and your ankle feels unstable, then strapping may be helpful for additional support.

- The timescales given are intended as a guide only.
- Excessive periods of rest will produce a worse outcome.

### **STAGE 1 Period of Relative Rest (Day 0 to Day 2)**

- If walking causes severe pain, **rest** for the first 24 hours.
- **Increase walking** slowly and for short amounts over the 1st 2 days after injury.
- You may limp to begin with but you can expect this to improve gradually with practice

#### **Every 2-3 hours:**

- **Elevate** foot.
- Apply Tubigrip or a bandage to **compress** the ankle from your knee to your toes.
- **Apply ice** for 10 -15 minutes — Use a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel to prevent ice burn. Take care if you have diabetes. Do not eat peas after use. Icing helps to decrease pain and swelling.

Continue elevation, compression and regular icing while the ankle remains painful and swollen.

As soon as you can start to perform gentle mobility exercises as given in **stage 2**.

If your injury is more than 3 days old you need to encourage yourself to be as active as possible and rest as little as you can. **MOTION IS LOTION** to a recovering ankle.

## STAGE 2 Non-Weight Bearing Exercises (Day 2 onwards)

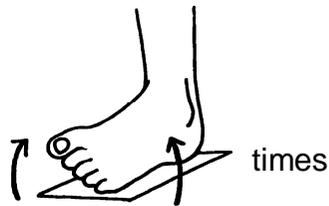
Even if you have constant pain you should begin to exercise the ankle gently and walk short distances. Try to walk smoothly but it is ok to limp in the beginning.

- These gentle movements may hurt. You are not doing any harm
- It is reasonable to expect the pain to settle quickly after you have stopped the exercise. It may even feel better for having been moved.
- Try to move further each time.

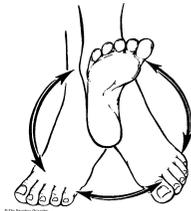
- Stretch toes away from you
- Pull your toes towards you
- Move your ankle up and down  
Up to 10 times
- Repeat every 3 hours.



- Rest foot on the floor
- Gently move the sole of your foot  
Inwards then outwards
- Move your foot in and out up to 10  
times
- Repeat every 3 hours.



- Gently make circling movements  
with your foot.
- Circle in a clockwise then anti clock  
wise direction up to 10 times.
- Repeat every 3 hours.



**Continue elevation, compression and regular icing while the ankle remains painful and swollen.**

If your injury is a week or more old, you should also do **stage 3** exercises.

## STAGE 3 Weight-Bearing Exercises (After 1 week or sooner as you feel able) Remember some discomfort would be normal

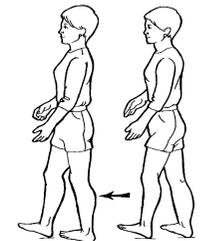
Gradually try to walk further.  
Continue with the movement exercises from stage 2.

Add weight-bearing exercises.  
Start with just a few then build up to 10 of each exercise.

- Balance on your injured leg.
- Begin using a wall or table for support.
- Start balancing for 5 –10 seconds.
- Aim to balance for up to 1 minute.



- In standing push up onto tip toes
- Start with both legs.
- Progress to standing on one leg only.
- Do up to 10 times, 3 times a day.



- Walk on your toes across the room
- Walk on your heels across the room
- Do up to 5 times, 3 times a day.

- In standing bend your front leg.
- Take injured leg backwards and push  
your heel into the floor.
- Feel a stretch at the back of the calf.
- Hold this for 20 - 30 seconds.
- Repeat up to 5 times, 3 times a day.



**Continue elevation, compression and regular icing while it feels helpful to do so. Often this may be a week or 2.**