

Ongoing Ankle Rehabilitation

This booklet can be used to help to progress and continue the improvement of your ankle injury after the first 6 weeks.

Even a simple ankle sprain can take up to 3 months or more to get back to a high impact sport – and fractures even longer.

There are no definitive time scales for when you should be doing each exercise as everyone's injuries are different. This sheet will give you some ideas of progression and the variation of exercises needed to get a strong & stable ankle.

From the 6 week mark it is OK to make the ankle a little uncomfortable, or to ache from exercise, but the **golden rule is, it should settle down fairly quickly with rest, certainly overnight.** If it does not do this, you have overdone the exercises and need to rest up more. Unless you have fallen again you have not re-injured your ankle. Remember to pace your exercises and build up steadily.

Consider your footwear as this will have an influence on how your ankle feels.

- Start with shoes, boots if you have them
- Avoid ballet pumps, flip-flops or Crocs for at least 3 months as these give no support for your foot and therefore your ankle.

There are 3 areas to concentrate on when rehabilitating an ankle injury; Proprioception, Range of Movement and Strength. You will be able to find many good guides and advice online under any simple search, but here are some ideas.

- 1) Proprioception (Balance)** good proprioception helps to prevent further injury
- Standing on the injured leg and balance, initially just being still and building up the time

- Progress to dynamic balance, cleaning your teeth, drying after a shower, throwing a ball against the wall etc, all standing on the injured leg.
- & then close your eyes!
- Standing on a pillow or cushion on the injured side.
- Use a wobble/balance board when at the gym

2) Range Of Movement (ROM)

- Calf stretches in standing
- Toe crunches and curls; try scrunching tissues with your toes.

After 6-8 weeks if your ankle is stiff but pain free, progress to

- Eccentric loading or heel hangs on a step. This will give a deeper calf stretch. Rising up onto your toes from this position is a good strengthening exercise too.
- Kneeling to stretch the front of your foot, you may have to ease into this over several weeks before it is truly comfortable.

3) Strength

- Any gym work, adjust resistance and time accordingly. Be warned, running often takes 12 weeks or more to be comfortable.
- Heel raises, coming up onto your toes initially on both feet. Aim to increase the height and hold of the exercise before increasing the repetitions. Progress to single leg on the injured side.
- Progress to walking around a room on toes, then on heels

- Eversion strength which really helps to stabilise the ankle. Put your injured foot, little toe side, against a wall & push out and up. You should feel the muscle contract on the outside of your shin.
- After 6-8 weeks try walking short distances on uneven ground, beaches or cobbles. The more uneven the surface the harder the ankle has to work. It could be many weeks before this is feeling normal
- Practise jumping using both feet, progress to hopping on the injured leg.
- Ease back into running – start with fast walking before running, add in slopes and hills. Start with lower impact surfaces, treadmill – grass – tarmac.

Returning To Sport

There should be no pain, very little or no swelling and a full ROM before you consider sport. You should feel you have 90-100% normal strength.

Before starting to compete, ensure you can do the sport specific requirements for your sport.

These could include

- running/sprinting,
- jumping/hopping,
- stop/start
- zig zag running

There is a lot of information on the internet if you search advanced ankle rehabilitation exercises.

If you have any problems during your rehabilitation and need further guidance, seek advice from a physiotherapist. If you are still under the care of a Consultant through a clinic you could contact the clinic, if not via your GP.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

© **Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust**

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E