



## FIFTY SHADES OF PURPLE: Immediate Treatment of Ankle Sprains

The very common ankle sprain can be more complex than you think and requires proper management to ensure a full recovery. The following leaflet outlines what you should do immediately after you sprain your ankle. Further leaflets in the series outline exercises you can do to help in the longer term rehabilitation of the injury.

### WHAT IS AN ANKLE SPRAIN?

An ankle sprain is a stretch or tear in one or more of the lateral (outside) ligaments of the ankle. Ankle ligaments are slightly elastic bands of tissue that keep the ankle bones in place. Because the ankle is responsible for both weight-bearing and mobility, it is particularly susceptible to injury. The relatively small joint has to withstand large forces exerted when walking, running and jumping, especially if the surface is uneven.

Most ankle sprains happen when the ankle twists or rolls suddenly, usually a rapid and uncontrolled movement. The most common injuries happen when the foot rolls onto the outside of the ankle, straining the outside ligaments of the ankle joint. Symptoms of a sprained ankle include; pain, tenderness and swelling, bruising, trouble moving the ankle, and sometimes an inability to put your full weight on the ankle.

### HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO HEAL?

Most people recover completely from mild sprains within two to six weeks. More severe sprains can take up to six months before you can return to full activity, or sport. Once a significant sprain occurs, without good rehabilitation the joint may never be as strong as it was before the injury. It is not surprising therefore that many people have a history of repeated ankle sprains. With the correct rehabilitation however, you can help your ankle become even stronger than it was before the injury.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Tissue injury usually involves damage to small blood vessels that results in bleeding at the site of injury. This bleeding leads to inflammation, part of the natural healing process. However, the body tends to overreact to sudden traumatic injury and as a result excess inflammatory fluid accumulates which can result in 'scar' tissue production. Too much scar tissue may prevent normal function with reduced flexibility and increased risk of re-injury.

It is important to get medical advice to gain a positive diagnosis and

correct treatment. Follow the PRICE guidelines immediately after injury and for at least 3 days afterwards before doing anything else. Your local physical therapist as well as most massage therapists can assist you with this:

**PROTECT** - Protect the injured tissue from undue stress and avoid ALL movements in the same direction as when the injury occurred.

**REST** - Unload the joint (take the weight off it) as much as you can in the first 72 hours after injury. Try and avoid walking on the joint as much as possible.

**ICE** - Ice is an amazing natural healer and a great short-term pain reducer. It is also believed to have a beneficial effect in reducing swelling and promoting healing. The optimal amount of time to apply ice is around 10-15 minutes in bony areas such as the ankle. It can be applied as often as desired to achieve pain relief, ideally every 1-2 hours.

**COMPRESSION** - This is advised for the first 72 hours, but only while your foot *isn't* elevated. The compression can be firm as long as it doesn't cause pins and needles or any loss of feeling around the joint.

**ELEVATION** - Reduces the flow of blood to the area which helps reduce swelling. Elevation is definitely recommended in the first 72 hours after injury. However remove any compression while your foot is elevated unless you are wearing just a light compression bandage.

When following **PRICE** it is also important to avoid **HARM**, hence the saying: '*Give PRICE and avoid HARM*'. HARM is an acronym for Heat, Alcohol, Running, Massage.

Following this acute management phase, your physical therapist will start some 'hands-on' treatment to mobilise and strengthen the joint. This phase of treatment is crucial to ensure you return to full function and prevent future injury.

Adequate preparation for activity is key and weight-bearing should progress gently. Drastic changes in activity level and performing unpractised skills expose your ankle to re-injury. Gradually build up your fitness level. Your ankle, and the rest of your body, will thank you for it!

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# ANKLE SPRAIN - Phase 1

## YOUR REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

This exercise programme has specific exercises to strengthen muscles around the ankle as well as improve balance and joint position sense (proprioception) of your ankle. In order to achieve proper rehabilitation of your injury it is important to ensure the exercises are performed with good technique. Poor practice may place potential strain on your injury. The following leaflet includes some exercises to help in your rehabilitation.

## GUIDANCE FOR STRETCHING EXERCISES

Hold all the stretches for 20 seconds each and repeat them five times

on each leg. It is important to stretch the uninjured muscles so that both legs reach a similar point of flexibility.

## PROGRESSION SPEED

Your therapist will advise you on the speed you should progress on the strengthening/movement control and proprioception progression programme. Progression is not just about being able to do the exercise but to do it correctly, with appropriate control. Remember poor practice leads to poor performance and potential strain on your injury. If at any time you feel pain or discomfort stop the exercises and consult your therapist.



### HEEL RAISES SITTING

Sit upright on a chair, with your feet flat on the floor. Slowly raise your legs up onto your toes. Hold, and gradually control the movement back down to the starting position. This is a useful calf pump exercise to improve circulation to your lower legs, as well as improving mobility of the ankle joints.

SETS	REPS
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 **Video:**  
<http://youtu.be/aujGDka4o8k>

### ONE LEG STAND

Stand on one leg, and try to keep your balance. Be careful and hold on to a wall for support when you first start this exercise. A single leg balance exercise such as this is an enormously valuable exercise, and its benefits including strengthening the muscles and ligaments around the ankles and knees, and improving balance. Try to incorporate this into daily chores - stand like this whilst waiting for the kettle to boil or while brushing your teeth. Progress this exercise by closing your eyes and maintaining your balance.



SETS	REPS
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 **Video:**  
[http://youtu.be/ZLxyh\\_PEstl](http://youtu.be/ZLxyh_PEstl)

### PASSIVE EVERSION WITH TOWEL SITTING



Sitting on a chair, wrap a towel around the arch of your foot. Pull your foot outwards and upwards with the towel, to improve mobility to your ankle. This must not be forced and must be performed within the limits of pain.

SETS	REPS
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 **Video:**  
[http://youtu.be/9BzLpwBm\\_I8](http://youtu.be/9BzLpwBm_I8)

### PASSIVE INVERSION WITH TOWEL SITTING



Sitting on a chair wrap a towel around the ball of your foot. Pull your foot inwards and upwards with the towel. This will mobilise your ankle. You can also hold the position and create a stretch in the outside lower part of your leg. This must not be forced and must be performed within the limits of pain.

SETS	REPS
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 **Video:**  
<http://youtu.be/wFqI2AxI8PQ>

### ALPHABET ANKLE SITTING

Sitting bare foot, lift your foot off the floor. Use your toes and ankle to draw letters of the alphabet. Start with "a" and then progress right through the alphabet to "z". Keep each letter and movement controlled and specific.



SETS	REPS
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 **Video:**  
<http://youtu.be/foZVMfN2608>

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