
Ankle Sprain Rehabilitation Protocol

The intent of this protocol is to provide guidelines for progression of rehabilitation. It is not intended to serve as a substitute for clinical decision-making. Progression through each phase of rehabilitation is based on clinical criteria and time frames as appropriate. Immediate supervised physical therapy will help with pain and swelling reduction and provide you with the proper guidance to rehabilitate your injury and resume normal activity as quickly and safely as possible.

Phase I - Acute Phase

Goals:

- Diminish pain/inflammation
- Full pain-free range of motion
- Prevent muscular inhibition/re-educate inhibited muscles
- Resume normal gait pattern

Precautions:

Avoid full weight bearing until ambulation can be accomplished using a normal gait pattern with little to no pain.

Treatment:

- RICE: rest, ice, compression, and elevation to reduce pain and inflammation
- Modalities (ultrasound, electrical stimulation) to reduce pain and inflammation
- Manual therapy as indicated for pain, inflammation and mobility
- Compression wrap to reduce swelling
- Ankle bracing
- Crutch use until a normal gait pattern is achieved
- Active range of motion in all planes as tolerated (alphabet exercises)
- Foot intrinsic strengthening as tolerated (towel scrunch or marble pick up)
- Gentle isometric strengthening exercises in all planes as tolerated

Criteria for progression to phase II:

- Minimal swelling/pain
- Full or near full pain-free active range of motion
- Normal gait pattern without crutches

Phase II - Early Strengthening:

Goals:

- Full pain-free range of motion

Resume normal gait pattern at varying speeds and on uneven surfaces

Pain-free strengthening

Precautions:

Avoid activity that causes pain rated greater than 3/10

Treatment:

Modalities to reduce pain and inflammation as needed

Manual therapy as indicated for pain, inflammation, and mobility

Continue bracing for activity

Continue active range of motion with light terminal stretching

4-plane theraband strengthening

Continue foot intrinsic strengthening

Initiate balance and proprioception exercises as tolerated (single limb stance, rocker board)

Stationary biking and aqua-jogging in a pool as tolerated

Criteria for progression to phase III:

Minimal swelling/pain with light activity

Full pain-free active range of motion

Normal pain-free gait pattern at varying speeds and on uneven surfaces

Phase III - Advanced Strengthening:

Goals:

Initiate intermediate and advance strengthening

Pain-free weight-bearing strengthening

Precautions:

Avoid activity that causes pain rated greater than 3/10

Treatment:

Continue bracing for activity

Begin double leg squats, calf raises, and toe raises

Progress to single leg squats, calf raises, and toe raises as tolerated

Advance balance and proprioception exercises as tolerated - single leg stance, single leg balance drills, dyna disc, 5 point star

Initiate elliptical trainer and treadmill walking as tolerated

Initiate shallow pool jogging

Progress to initial agility and absorption exercises in pool, progress to dry land as tolerated

Begin straight plane dry land jogging

Begin controlled lateral agility work

Criteria for progression to phase IV:

Minimal swelling/pain with advanced activity

Passing score on a functional return to sport test

Criteria for progression to phase IV:

Minimal swelling/pain with advanced activity

Passing score on a functional return to sport test

Phase IV Return to Sports:

Goals:

Full functional strength, range of motion, balance, and proprioception

Prevention of future injury

Pain-free return to sports

Treatment:

Advanced single leg balance and proprioception exercises (dyna disc 5 point star, single leg squats on a dynadisc, BOSU)

Lateral agility exercises and advanced agility drills

Consider bracing for activity/sports

Resume sports activity as tolerated starting with controlled low intensity activity and progressing to high intensity activity as tolerated

Criteria for discharge:

Full unrestricted return to sports/competition with no pain, inflammation, or limitations