

Treating Chronic Ankle Sprains in Sports

By Cori Thompson, MS, ATC, CSCS & Phil Page, MS, PT, ATC, CSCS

Ankle sprains can become a chronic issue for various reasons including incomplete ligament healing, inadequate rehabilitation, and lack of ankle support. Chronic ankle instability is defined as an ankle that “gives way” frequently resulting in repeated ankle sprains. This occurs most often when a player sprains their ankle and does not adequately rehabilitate the injury before returning to play.

Physiologically, the torn ligaments of the ankle continue to heal for 4-6 weeks after the initial injury. As they heal, the ligaments align in an elongated fashion which causes abnormal laxity (looseness) of the ankle. The looseness combined with loss of supporting lower leg muscle strength, coordination, and balance (proprioception) results in ankle instability.

It is possible to regain full functional stability and return to sport specific activity with decreased chance of injury by completing a rehabilitation program consisting of strengthening the muscles which support the ankle joint and retraining motor and balance skills. Ankle bracing and/or taping is helpful, but should not be relied upon fully without the addition of ankle exercises. Bracing or taping without also performing strengthening and balance exercises weekly, can actually weaken the ankle.

In tennis, or other multi-directional sports, it is important to be able to perform lateral push-off as well as quick sprinting. For this reason, we have included some multi-directional sport specific ankle strength and balance exercises as well as basic ankle rehabilitation exercises below.

Tips for athletes treating ankle injuries:

- ✚ **Taping and bracing may help prevent chronic recurring ankle sprains if combined with appropriate rehabilitation exercises**
- ✚ **Use Thera-Band® elastic bands to incorporate ankle exercises during travel and competition**
- ✚ **Adding balance and ankle strengthening exercises into your weekly training regimen (3-4 times weekly) will help prevent future injuries. Balance exercises should be progressed from stable to unstable surfaces and can be completed based upon times (i.e. 3 sets of 30 sec holds)**

Thera-Band Ankle Exercises



Thera-Band Loop Ankle Inversion

Begin with loop around the foot. Cross your opposite leg on top and bring the loop under that foot, grasping the end at waist level. Rotate your foot inward against the band. Hold and slowly return.



Thera-Band Loop Ankle Dorsiflexion + Eversion

Loop band around the outside of each foot. Stabilize one end of the loop with one foot. Lift and point your foot outward, keeping your heel on the ground. Hold and slowly return.

Perform these exercises under the supervision of a qualified healthcare provider. Certain exercises may not be appropriate for every individual, while other exercises may be indicated. All exercises should be performed painfree.



Thera-Band Loop Ankle Eversion

Begin with loop around the foot. Bring the loop under and around the opposite foot, grasping the end at waist level. Rotate your foot inward against the band. Hold and slowly return.

TIP: Keep your knee steady; don't rotate your leg to complete the motion.



Thera-Band Loop Ankle Dorsiflexion

Begin with loop around the foot. Bring the loop under and around the opposite foot, grasping the end at waist level. Pull your foot upward against the band. Hold and slowly return.



Thera-Band Loop Ankle Plantarflexion in Long-Sitting

Securely loop the band around your foot. Grasp the other end of the band at waist level. Push your foot down against the band. Hold and slowly return.

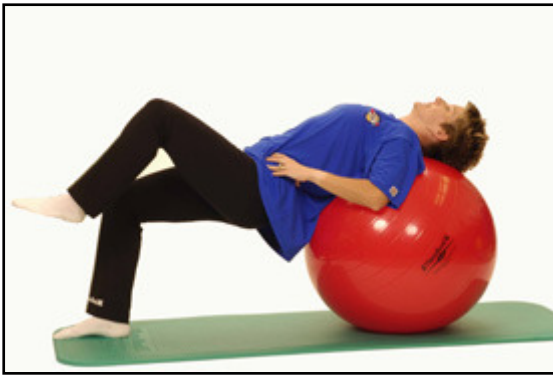
Thera-Band Exercise Ball Ankle Balance & Stabilization



Pro Series Exercise Ball Sitting Hip Flexion

Sit on ball with back in neutral position. Tighten abdominals while flexing hip. Return and repeat on other side. Keep ball stable and avoid rounding back.

Perform these exercises under the supervision of a qualified healthcare provider. Certain exercises may not be appropriate for every individual, while other exercises may be indicated. All exercises should be performed painfree.



Pro Series Exercise Ball Bridge Hip Lift Stabilization

Lay on ball in bridge position. Keep back stabilized and hips aligned with trunk. Slowly lift one knee upward, flexing the hip. Be careful not to let the hips drop down. Slowly return to starting position. Repeat on other leg.

Wobble Board Protocol for Chronic Ankle Sprains

Wester et al. JOSPT 23:332-336



Thera-Band Wobble Board 2-leg Balance

Stand with both feet centered on board. Keep board parallel to ground. Keep your back and neck straight. Avoid hyperextending your knees.



Thera-Band Wobble Board 1 leg balance

Stand with one foot centered on board. Keep board parallel to ground. Keep your back and neck straight. Avoid hyperextending your knee.

Perform these exercises under the supervision of a qualified healthcare provider. Certain exercises may not be appropriate for every individual, while other exercises may be indicated. All exercises should be performed painfree.

About the Authors:

Cori Thompson, MS, ATC, CSCS, PES, is an aspiring doctoral candidate in Exercise Science. Thompson was formerly on the USTA Sport Science staff as a Strength and Conditioning Coach/ Certified Athletic Trainer. Based in Delray Beach, Florida; Thompson works as an athletic trainer for the USTA Women's Professional Circuit while planning to further her post-graduate education.

Phil Page, MS, PT, ATC, CSCS directs the Thera-Band Academy. He is a licensed physical therapist and certified athletic trainer. His clinical and research interests include the role of muscle imbalance in musculoskeletal pain, and in promoting physical activity in older adults. He has presented internationally on exercise and rehabilitation topics, and has numerous publications. He has a master's degree in Exercise Physiology, and is pursuing his PhD in Kinesiology at LSU. He is also a certified strength and conditioning specialist. He has worked with the athletic programs at LSU, Tulane, the New Orleans Saints and Seattle Seahawks, as well as the United States Olympic Track and Field Trials

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