


Those “Pesky” Ankle Sprains: What to do about them?

With the warmer weather we have been having, comes hopefully increased outdoor activity. However, this also can bring issues with spraining ankles as those improperly placed sinkholes or potholes can sneak up on us. We would like to share some helpful information that will assist your decision making after you or someone you know may injure the ankle with increased outdoor activity.


Lateral ankle sprains are the most common musculoskeletal injury in the athletic population and have the highest prevalence of recurrence specifically within the first year of injury. Often these injuries are self-limiting and people regain function within a month without formal treatment. The problem with this approach, especially in the athletic population, is that current research shows lasting functional deficits that can increase your chance for re-occurrence or cause early onset osteoarthritis. Research finds that decreased ankle mobility, ankle strength/power, joint instability, and decreased balance remain long after the initial injury if not properly treated. Overall, the medical literature proves people who sustain recurring ankle sprains have a decreased quality of life due to the residual symptoms.



Lucky for us, there is a solution to preventing future ankle sprains as well as eliminating the lasting functional deficits mentioned above in order to increase your quality of life if you or your child has frequent ankle sprains. Physical therapy has shown to be superior to standard care in treating ankle sprains and preventing recurrence. Recent research shows neuromuscular rehabilitation such as physical therapy is superior to the R.I.C.E method or bracing alone. Patients who undergo physical therapy for ankle sprains have decreased recurrence rates as well as decreased chance of developing early onset osteoarthritis.

The key elements of good physical therapy for ankle sprains as mentioned above is neuromuscular rehabilitation as well as proprioceptive training.

You may ask how long do I have to attend therapy and how much will it cost me? Well there is good news for this as well. Studies have found that on average as little as 1 month of physical therapy can prevent recurrence of ankle sprains. This is what we commonly see from our patients as mobility and strength losses are regained quickly allowing for progression to balance and neuromuscular training within the first two weeks. There is also a study that broke down the cost of healthcare after ankle sprains and physical therapy accounted for 7.9% of the total costs for care after an ankle sprain. The bulk of costs came from physician visits as well as diagnostic imaging (XRAY).



It is a win, win. Physical therapy will be a cost effective approach to relieving pain and functional losses after sustaining an ankle sprain, as well as preventing future occurrence of these “pesky” injuries. Do the smart thing and save yourself from the lasting pain and agony caused from repeated ankle sprains and Get PT!!!

Paul Kreher, PT, DPT, Cert MDT

Supervisor Physical Therapist at UR Noyes Health Physical and Sports Therapy