

Preventing Ankle Sprains

What is an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains are common injuries. They usually happen when the ankle “turns in” more than it should. Ligaments connect the bones of the ankle together. When a ligament is stretched or torn, a “sprained” ankle is the result. Ligaments are tough bands of tissue, but when they are pulled to their limit, they can tear. If the tear is big, the result is a bad sprain.

Flexibility, strength and good balance can help prevent ankle sprains from happening. If you lack these characteristics, your doctor may suggest that you tape your ankle or wear an ankle brace when you exercise.

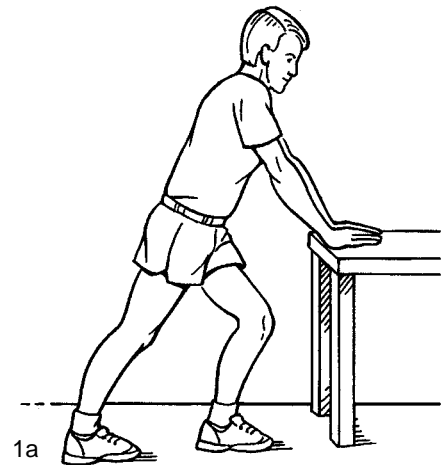
What can I do to prevent ankle sprains?

- Stretch before and after you exercise (*Picture 1*).
- Do special exercises that strengthen the muscles around your ankle (*Picture 2*).
- Do special exercises to improve your balance (*Picture 3*).
- If you have had ankle problems before, ask your doctor about taping your ankle (*Picture 4*) or wearing an ankle brace.

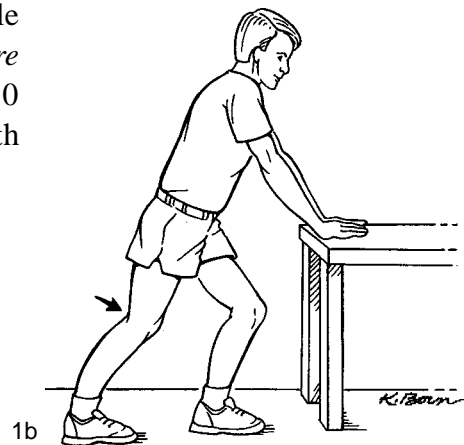
The following pages describe how to do these stretches and exercises.

Stretching (Picture 1)

Always stretch before and after you exercise. First, face a table or a wall and lean against it, with your back leg straight and your front leg bent (*Picture 1a*). Lean forward with your back heel on the floor until you feel a stretch in the calf of your back leg. Hold that position for 15 to 30 seconds.



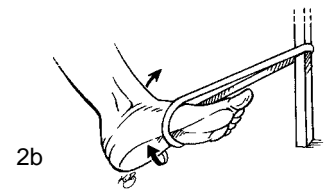
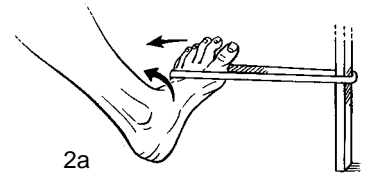
Then slightly bend your back leg while keeping both heels on the floor (*Picture 1b*). Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Make sure you stretch both legs once before and after exercising.



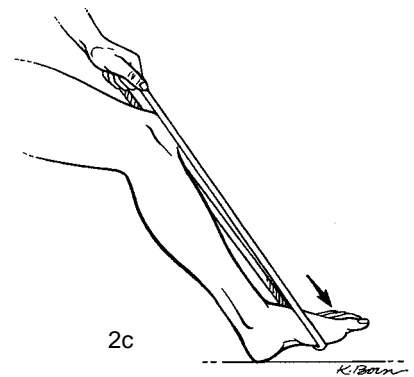
Ankle Exercises

Repeat each exercise 10 to 15 times and do each set of exercises three times a day. Get about two feet of heavy rubber band or tubing (from a sports or medical supply store). Tie it into a large loop.

Sit on a chair. Keep your heel on the floor and do the exercises with your foot and ankle, not your whole leg. Place one end of the loop around the leg of a heavy chair or table and loop the other end of the band over your foot. First move your ankle out and up (Picture 2a), keeping the band tight. Then move the ankle in and up (Picture 2b).



Remove the band from the table leg and hold it in your hands. Keeping one end of the band looped around your foot, press your foot down toward the floor against the resistance of the rubber band (Picture 2c). Try to keep your heel on the floor, just like pressing on the accelerator pedal of a car.

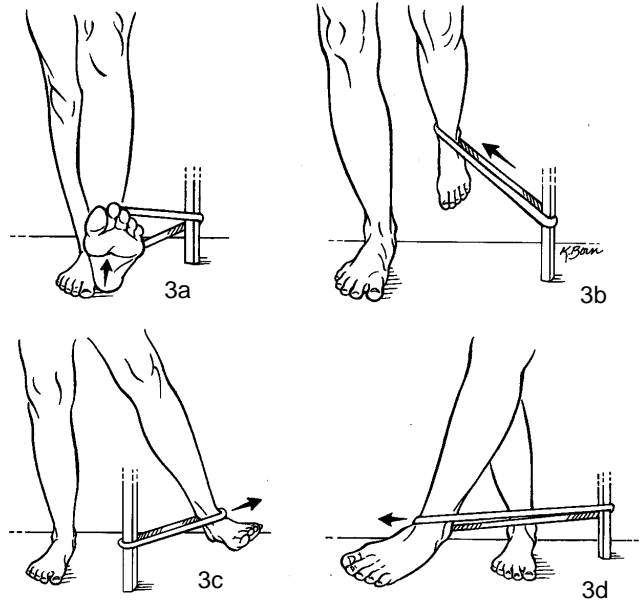


Heel raises can be done by standing on one foot, using a chair for balance (Picture 2d). Slowly raise your heel off the ground, then slowly lower your heel to the floor.



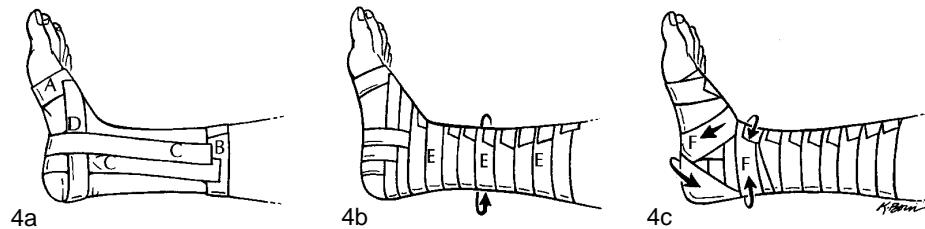
Ankle Exercises (continued)

Loop one end of the elastic band around the leg of a table and loop the other end around your ankle. Balance on the other foot and slowly kick the foot with the band out in all four directions (front, back, left and right—*Pictures 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d*). Kick forward 10 to 15 times. Then kick the same number of times to the back, to the left and to the right. Switch legs and do the same thing.



Ankle Taping (Picture 4)

Use good-quality, 1-inch athletic tape. Apply strips in order (*Picture 4a*), starting with anchor strips A and B, then the stirrup strips (C) and the lateral strip (D). Add circular strips (E) of tape (*Picture 4b*), but do not wind them too tightly. Apply a single strip of tape (F) in a figure eight around the ankle (*Picture 4c*); this is the heel lock.



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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