

Ankle - Lateral Ligament Sprain

This is an injury to the ligaments on the outside lateral part of the ankle. The lateral ligament complex refers to several ligaments on the outside of the ankle that connect the fibula to several bones in the ankle and foot. These ligaments provide important structural support to the foot and ankle. They are frequently injured and are the most common sporting injury. The two ligaments that are usually involved are the calcaneofibular ligament and anterior talofibular ligament.

A sprain means that some ligament fibres are torn. Sprains occur through trauma. Lateral ligament sprains occur when the foot is forced strongly into inversion (turned in). It is sometimes associated with other injuries including fractures and damage to the joint surface.

Pain and Symptoms

The degree of symptoms and physical appearance of the ankle depends on the severity of the incident but will typically

- Pain over the outside and front of the ankle
- Swelling on the outside of the ankle
- Bruising around the ankle or foot
- Pain with walking

Risk Factors

Factors that increase the risk of this occurring are:

- Hypermobility (or excessive mobility) through the ankle joint (flexible or loose ligaments)
- Poor muscular strength
- Poor sense of position (or proprioception) of the lower limb
- Environmental e.g. uneven ground
- Running sports with direct and indirect contact
- Previous sprain

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is usually made from the history and from clinical testing. Further investigations such as x-ray, MRI and ultrasound can be undertaken to confirm the diagnosis and to assess other structures.

Treatment

This will depend on the severity of the damage and may include;

- Activity Modification – This will help protect the ligament from further trauma, and will assist with pain management
- Taping/Bracing – In the initial stages the ligament must be protected, and held into a shortened position to ensure optimal function when healed. This can be achieved via the application of a boot or brace or support tape. Which is chosen will vary between different grades of injury and different individuals.
- Therapeutic Exercise – This program will depend on the nature and severity of your injury and the goals of rehabilitation, and will be designed to restore full function in your ankle to enable a rapid return to your pre-injury level of activity. This will include exercises for strengthening, balance and proprioception, and injury prevention exercises.

Recovery Time

Grade 1 – 2 - 3 weeks

Grade 2 – 4 - 6 weeks

Grade 3 – variable

You may be advised to wear an ankle brace or support tape when you return to pre-injury activity. Your Physiotherapist can best advise you regarding this.

