

ROBERT PETTIT, MD

Restoring Function. Maximizing Performance.

ORTHOPAEDIC SPORTS MEDICINE · BEACON ORTHOPAEDICS & SPORTS
MEDICINE

CINCINNATI, OH · FORT THOMAS, KY

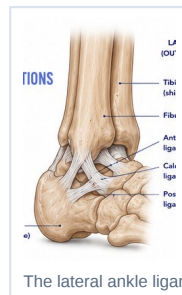
(513) 354-3700

FELLOWSHIP-TRAINED · BOARD CERTIFIED (ABOS) · MAKO ROBOTICS CERTIFIED · CINCINNATI REDS TEAM PHYSICIAN

FOOT & ANKLE CONDITION

Ankle Sprain

Ankle Ligament Sprain — Patient Condition Guide



The lateral ankle ligaments (ATFL, CFL) that are sprained · for education; your anatomy may differ

OVERVIEW

An ankle sprain is a stretch or tear of the ligaments supporting the ankle, most commonly on the outer (lateral) side, and typically occurs when the foot rolls inward during activity or an awkward step.

ANATOMY

The lateral ankle ligaments — primarily the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL) — are the most frequently injured. Sprains are graded I through III based on the degree of ligament damage.

SYMPTOMS

- Pain and swelling on the outer ankle
- Bruising that may spread to the foot
- Difficulty bearing weight, especially with higher-grade sprains
- A feeling of instability or repeated "rolling" of the ankle

DIAGNOSIS

Exam includes assessing ligament laxity and tenderness patterns; X-rays are used selectively based on specific criteria to rule out fracture. MRI is reserved for cases with persistent symptoms or suspicion of associated cartilage injury.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

The large majority of ankle sprains heal well with the RICE approach (rest, ice, compression, elevation), bracing, and progressive physical therapy focused on strength and balance. Chronic instability from repeated sprains occasionally requires ligament reconstruction.

RECOVERY TIMELINE

- Grade I: 1–2 weeks
- Grade II: 3–6 weeks with bracing and therapy

- Grade III: 6–12 weeks
- Balance and proprioception training reduces the risk of re-injury

FAQS

Q Do I need an X-ray for my ankle sprain?

Not always — specific clinical criteria help determine when an X-ray is needed to rule out a fracture.

Q Why do my ankles keep rolling?

Repeated sprains can lead to chronic instability from stretched ligaments and reduced balance, which is addressed with targeted rehab.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/ankle-sprain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.

HOME EXERCISE PROGRAM

Ankle Sprains: Exercises & Strengthening

After the initial swelling settles: restore motion, strengthen the outside of the ankle, and retrain balance to prevent re-injury.

Stop and call the office at (513) 354-3700 if any exercise causes sharp pain, swelling, numbness, or symptoms that worsen into the next day. This general program does not replace an individualized plan from Dr. Pettit or your physical therapist.



Calf Pumps

10 reps each direction, hourly

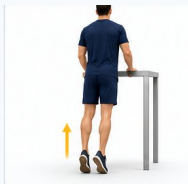
Point the foot away from you, then flex it back toward you, keeping the leg straight. Promotes circulation.



Band Ankle Eversion

3 sets of 15, daily

With a band looped around the forefoot and anchored, turn the sole of the foot outward against the resistance, then return slowly.



Calf Raises

3 sets of 15, daily

Rise up onto the toes with support nearby, pause, and lower slowly with control.



Single-Leg Balance

3 × 30 seconds per leg, daily

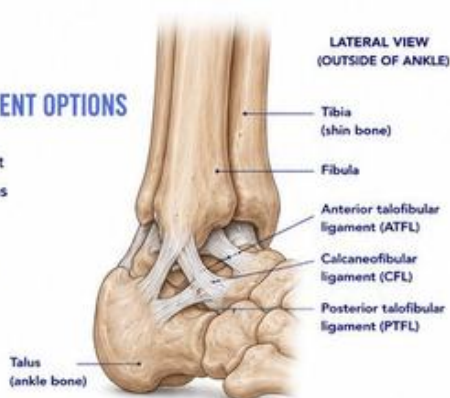
Stand on one leg near a counter for safety. Progress by closing your eyes or standing on a pillow.

ANKLE SPRAIN

UNDERSTANDING YOUR INJURY & TREATMENT OPTIONS

Ankle sprains occur when the ligaments that support your ankle are stretched or torn. This usually happens when your foot twists or rolls inward (inversion).

Most ankle sprains heal well with proper treatment and rehabilitation.



SPRAIN GRADES



GRADE I (MILD)
Ligament is stretched but not torn.



GRADE II (MODERATE)
Ligament is partially torn.



GRADE III (SEVERE)
Ligament is completely torn.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Ankle sprains most often occur when the foot rolls inward (inversion) or, less commonly, outward (eversion).



Inversion
(foot rolls inward)



Eversion
(foot rolls outward)

COMMON SYMPTOMS



Pain, swelling, and tenderness on the outside (or inside) of the ankle



Bruising, which may appear within 24–48 hours



Difficulty walking or bearing weight



Instability or feeling like your ankle may “give out”



Stiffness or limited range of motion

DIAGNOSIS

Your doctor will perform a physical exam and may order X-rays to rule out a fracture.



Physical Exam



X-ray
(rules out fracture)



MRI
(if needed)

TREATMENT OPTIONS

1. NON-SURGICAL TREATMENT (Most ankle sprains)

- ✓ Protection, rest, ice, compression, and elevation (PRICE)
- ✓ Immobilization in a brace or boot for severe sprains
- ✓ Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications as needed
- ✓ Physical therapy to restore strength, balance, and range of motion
- ✓ Gradual return to activity as symptoms improve



GOAL: Reduce pain and swelling, restore stability, and return to normal activities.

2. SURGICAL TREATMENT (Rarely needed)

Surgery is considered for severe Grade III sprains with persistent instability after non-surgical treatment has failed.

Surgical goals:

- ✓ Repair or stabilize torn ligaments
- ✓ Restore ankle stability
- ✓ Prevent recurrent sprains

GOAL: Restore stability and prevent future instability.

3. SURGICAL TREATMENT – LIGAMENT REPAIR (Example)

The torn ligament is repaired and re-attached to the bone using suture anchors.



RECOVERY & REHABILITATION (Typical Timeline)



0-3 DAYS
Protect & Reduce Swelling



- Rest and avoid painful activities
- Ice 15–20 min, 3–5x/day
- Compression wrap
- Elevate above heart



3-10 DAYS
Restore Motion



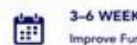
- Remove brace as directed
- Gentle range of motion exercises
- Continue swelling control



1-3 WEEKS
Rebuild Strength



- Strengthening exercises
- Balance and proprioception training
- Wean from brace



3-6 WEEKS
Improve Function



- Advanced strengthening
- Agility and functional training
- Sport-specific drills



6+ WEEKS
Return to Activity



- Return to sports when cleared by your doctor
- Continue injury prevention exercises

Recovery times vary. Most people return to normal daily activities in 1–3 weeks and sports in 6–8+ weeks.

PREVENTION TIPS

- ✓ Wear supportive footwear
- ✓ Strengthen ankles and improve balance
- ✓ Warm up before exercise or sports
- ✓ Use ankle braces or taping if recommended
- ✓ Be aware of uneven or slippery surfaces



WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE

- Unable to bear weight after injury
- Severe pain or swelling
- Numbness, tingling, or pale/cold foot
- Ankle feels unstable or “gives out”
- No improvement after several days



Scan for exercise videos and more information about ankle sprains.



ROBERT PETTIT, MD
SPORTS MEDICINE & JOINT REPLACEMENT SPECIALIST

This information is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always follow your surgeon's recommendations.