Ankle Pain

Understanding symptoms, treatment and recovery

Ankle Pain

A guide to symptoms, treatment and recovery



What is ankle pain?

Ankle pain can follow an injury, overuse or an underlying medical condition. Common causes include sprains, strains, arthritis, tendonitis and fractures.

Getting the right support

A physiotherapist can guide exercises and advise on footwear, activity changes and treatment options appropriate for your symptoms.

Causes and symptoms

Understanding and recognising ankle pain

What is ankle pain?

Ankle pain may follow injury, overuse or an underlying medical condition. Causes include sprains (stretched or torn ligaments), strains (overworked muscles or tendons), arthritis (joint inflammation), tendonitis (inflamed tendons) and fractures (broken bones).

Who gets ankle pain?

- Athletes and people who exercise vigorously and frequently
- People with previous ankle injuries
- Older adults with arthritis
- People who walk or stand for long periods

Symptoms

- Pain around the ankle
- Swelling or bruising
- Stiffness or reduced range of motion
- Instability or “giving way”
- Pain when walking, running or standing

Supporting recovery

Adapt activities that make your ankle hurt. A physiotherapist can advise on strengthening, flexibility, footwear, bracing and a gradual return to activity.

When to get assessed

Seek advice if pain does not improve after 1-2 weeks of self-care, if you cannot bear weight or walk normally, or if you have severe swelling, bruising or deformity.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Movements to support your recovery

Exercise examples

Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are suitable for you. Use controlled movements and work within comfort.



Movement and stretching

Ankle circles: Sit comfortably and slowly circle your ankle in both directions, 10 times each way.
Calf stretch: Face a wall with your hands supported. Keep your back leg straight and heel on the ground. Hold for 20-30 seconds.

Strengthening and exercise guidance

Heel raises: Use a sturdy chair for support. Rise onto your toes, then lower with control. Perform 10-15 repetitions for 2-3 sets.
Ask your physiotherapist which exercises are suitable for you and follow their advice.

Self-care and next steps

Management, treatment and when to seek help

Self-care and home management

Rest: avoid activities that worsen pain.
Ice: ice packs for 10-15 minutes, 2-3 times daily.
Compression: elastic bandage to reduce swelling.
Elevation: above heart level when possible.
Pain relief: paracetamol or NSAIDs if safe for you.

When to see a physiotherapist or doctor

- No improvement after 1-2 weeks of self-care
- Severe swelling, bruising or deformity
- Unable to bear weight or walk normally
- Recurrent ankle instability

Treatment physiotherapists may offer

Hands-on techniques (massage, mobilization, stretching); exercise for strength and flexibility; advice on footwear, bracing and activity modification; taping or orthotics for support and protection.

Prognosis

Most ankle pain improves in a few weeks to a few months with appropriate care. Early treatment and consistent exercise reduce chronic pain or instability risk.

References

NHS - Ankle Pain: www.nhs.uk/conditions/ankle-pain Chartered Society of Physiotherapy - Foot & Ankle Guidance

Questions or concerns?

Speak to your physiotherapist or doctor if symptoms persist or your ankle repeatedly gives way.

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