



**DynamicHealth**

**NHS**

## How to help your ankle pain



Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust: delivering excellence in musculo-skeletal services and pelvic health physiotherapy across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

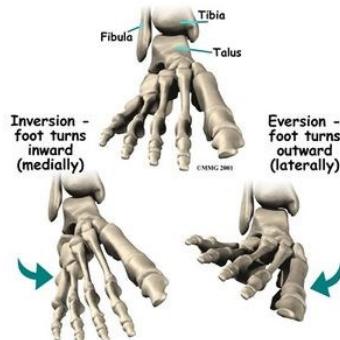
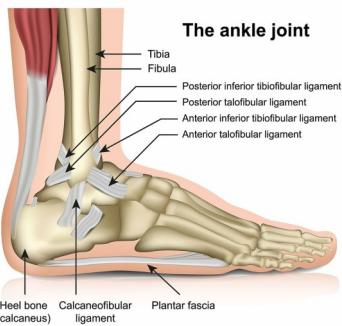
This guidance has been produced by the DynamicHealth physiotherapy service. It offers simple measures to help you manage your ankle problem safely; often the right advice and exercises are all you need to improve the problem. This leaflet has been made available to your GP, who may ask you to try the advice and exercises prior to consulting a physiotherapist.

**If your ankle pain started after recent trauma, please seek medical advice before reading further.**

## About the ankle

The ankle joint is primarily formed by three bones the tibia and fibula of the leg and talus from the foot. This is described as a synovial hinge joint which allows you to point your foot, as well as bringing the foot and toes up towards the shin (otherwise describe as plantarflexion and dorsiflexion). Other key movements are turning your foot in and outwards (otherwise known as inversion and eversion).

The ankle joint is bound together by strong tibiofibular ligaments (the deltoid ligament, anterior and posterior talofibular ligaments and the calcaneofibular ligament), which help to stabilise the joint. The ankle is further supported by muscles that pass over and around the joint.



## Causes of ankle pain

There are a number of reasons you may be experiencing ankle pain; it may have appeared suddenly following a twist or a fall, or pain can develop gradually over time as the body changes with age.

The Achilles tendon can sometimes get overused, which can cause pain at the back of the ankle.

Whatever the cause, exercise and following our simple tips can help reduce the symptoms.

## Ankle exercises

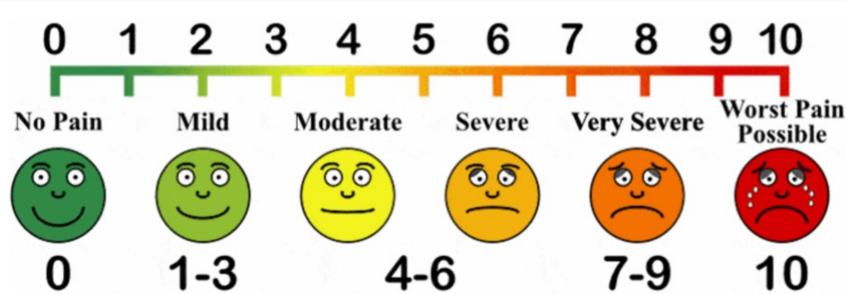
### How much should I do?

- **Exercise every other day** – allowing enough rest is important to let the soft tissues recover and develop.
- **Choose 3 or 4 exercises** from the set below that are challenging but manageable.
- **Perform 3–5 sets of 5 repetitions** of each exercise.
- **Rest for up to 1–2 minutes** between each set.
- **Once an exercise becomes easy, progress it** by increasing the number of repetitions (aim for 10) or for holding the positions for longer, or moving to a more challenging exercise.

The following exercises do not need to be completed in a linear fashion and it can be helpful to gradually build your range of movement and strength at the same time. Choosing some challenging but manageable exercises from each section may be helpful.

### How much pain is too much?

- **Before exercising, rate your pain** at that moment on a scale of 0–10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can imagine.
- **A maximum pain level of 4/10 while exercising is fine**, as long as this eases within 45 minutes of the session and does not interfere with sleep or activities the next day.
- **If your pain increases beyond this, simplify the exercise** by reducing the range of movement or number of repetitions, or try an easier exercise.



## Beginner exercises

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### Ankle rotations/ circles

Sitting or lying.

Rotate your ankle.

Change directions.



### Ankle pumps in supine

Lie on your back with your legs straight.

Bend and straighten your ankles.



### Isometric eversion

Sit on a chair or on the floor. Cross your feet and put the outer edges of your little toes together.

Press the outer edges of your little toes together. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times.



### Isometric ankle inversion

Sit on a chair or on the floor. Put the inner borders of your big toes together.

Press the inner borders of your big toes together.

Hold for approx. 5 secs.



### Seated isometric plantarflexion

Sit with your legs stretched out in front of you, with your arms supporting you. Feet resting against a wall.

Push your toes into the wall, as if to try and push the wall away. Feel the muscles of your calf tightening. Hold for 5 secs.



### Seated heel raise

Sit on a chair.

Lean body weight forward equally onto both thighs. Push up onto your toes and back down again.



### Standing calf stretch

Stand with the leg to be stretched straight behind you and the other leg bent in front of you. Take support from a wall or chair.

Lean your body forwards and down until you feel the stretching in the calf of the straight leg. Hold for approx. 30 secs. Relax. Stretch the other leg.



### Standing Soleus stretch

Stand in a walking position with the leg to be stretched behind you. Hold on to a support.

Bend the leg to be stretched and let the weight of your body stretch your calf without lifting the heel off the floor. Hold for approx. 30 secs. Relax.



### Resisted ankle plantarflexion with theraband

Sit with your leg straight and the loop of an exercise band around your foot. Hold both ends and take the slack off the band.

Straighten your ankle against the resistance. Return to the starting position resisting the pull from the band.



### Resisted Foot Supination (Calcaneus Inversion)

Attach an exercise band firmly to the side. Take the loop of the band around your forefoot.

Rotate the inner side of your foot in and upward against the resistance from the band. Return to the starting position in a controlled manner resisting the pull from the band.



### Resisted Foot Pronation (Calcaneus Eversion)

Attach an exercise band firmly to the side. Take the loop of the band around your forefoot.

Rotate the outer side of your foot outward against the resistance from the band. Return to the starting position in a controlled manner resisting the pull from the band.



### Resisted Ankle Bending (Dorsiflexion)

Sit with your leg straight and the loop of an exercise band around your foot. Attach a band firmly in front of you with the slack taken off.

Bend your ankle against the resistance. Return to the starting position (ankle nearly straight) in a controlled manner resisting the pull from the band.

## Advanced Exercises

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### Standing heel raise

Stand.

Push up on your toes.



### Standing single leg heel raise

Stand on one leg.

Push up on your toes.



### Single leg stand

Start by standing on one leg.

Balance for 10-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times



### Single-leg Balance Squat on a Balance Pad

Stand on one leg on a balance pad.

Squat down and push back up again. Your hip, knee, ankle and toes should stay aligned.



## Lateral Jumps

Stand tall next to a balance pad. Make sure that the pad doesn't slide.

Jump to the side and land on one leg on the balance pad. Land on bent hip and knee and make sure that the hip and knee are in line with the toes. Continue jumping sideways back and forth.

## Top tips

- Try and build your exercises into your everyday activities.
- You don't have to do all the exercises in one go.
- Don't feel you have to replicate the full movement of the exercise straight away. Use it as an initial guide.
- If one particular movement is painful, use this each week to evaluate your progress.
- It is normal for it to take 6-12 weeks before you see a good improvement in your pain, movement and strength.
- Don't stop moving your ankle - muscles need movement to keep them healthy.
- If your sleep is poor, try supporting your ankle on a pillow.
- General exercise can really help your recovery so try to keep going with other activities you enjoy to keep fit.
- Wear sensible, well-fitted shoes e.g. trainers.
- When resting, sit with your leg supported and ankle higher than your hip (especially if swollen).
- Try using an ice pack on your ankle for 10 - 15 mins (wrap in a damp towel to avoid ice burn) – DO NOT use ice on your ankle if you have poor sensation over the area, an infected wound, Raynaud's syndrome or cryoglobulinemia.

## **Lifestyle and Wellbeing Support Services**

<https://haycambspboro.co.uk/>

<https://healthyyou.org.uk/>

Speaking to the social prescriber at your GP practice can also be a very useful resource

**For further information about this service contact:**

**General Enquiries:** 0300 555 0123

Physiotherapy Dept, Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Hinchingbrooke Park, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 6NT

Physiotherapy Dept, Brookfields Campus, 351 Mill Road, Cambridge, CB1 3DF

Physiotherapy Dept, Princess of Wales Hospital, Lynn Road, Ely, Cambs, CB6 1DN

Physiotherapy Dept, Doddington Hospital, Benwick Road, Doddington, Cambs, PE15 0UG

Physiotherapy Dept, Rowan Lodge, North Cambs Hospital, The Park, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 3AB

Physiotherapy Dept, City Care Centre, Thorpe Road, Peterborough, PE3 6DB

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