

RUNNING INJURIES

PART 3

THE ANKLE SPRAIN

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A common running injury seen by athletes in all levels of competition, is the “twisted ankle” or ankle sprain. Ankle injuries are prevalent in sports requiring quick stops and starts or cutting and weaving movements. In football, soccer and gymnastics, the ankle sprain is the most commonly occurring sports injury, with the sprain being the second most common injury in basketball.

Sprains of the ankle are classified by severity and location. A ligament sprain or tear can be graded in three categories. Grade I being mild, Grade II being moderate, and Grade III being severe with complete tearing of one or more ligaments of the ankle. The lateral or outside ankle sprain is by far the most common sprain.

When the ankle is turned on, rolled over or otherwise twisted, often times not only do the ligaments become injured, but there can also be a disruption of the boney mechanics of the foot, leaving the athlete with pain and stiffness long after the initial injury. These abnormal joint mechanics must be recognized and corrected before the ankle can properly return to normal functioning.

Successful treatment and rehabilitation of an ankle sprain must include an organized plan of treatment measures. All initial treatment should be directed at limiting the degree of swelling. Generally speaking, early treatment should include Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation (PRICE). Protection is best achieved by proper taping or bracing, designed to limit any sideways tilt of the ankle. Rest is necessary to reduce further injury; however, limited motion in the upward and downward planes should be encouraged, for many studies have found ligaments need a certain amount of stress to heal properly. Ice should be used as long as it affords relief, or as swelling is present. Compression, such as an ACE wrap can be helpful in controlling swelling. Elevation of the injured ankle should be maintained as often as possible to allow gravity to assist in reducing swelling.

Be sure to look for Running Injuries, Part 4 which will highlight advanced rehabilitation measures for difficult and/or recurring ankle sprains.

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