**Can ankle sprains be prevented?**

It is known that after an ankle sprain there is an increased risk of re-injury within 1 year. This is possibly due to the fact that, as studies have shown, even 12 months after the injury some individuals will find that the strength of ligament is only 80% of normal strength [1].

So if you have sustained an ankle sprain how can you help prevent recurrence or re-injury?  External measures, such as braces and strapping tape restrict the ankle range of motion reducing the stress on the damaged ligament. Taping, bracing (and also balance training) have been associated with reducing the relative risk of recurrent ankle sprains by approximately 50% [2]. Neuromuscular training or balance training aims to re-establish and strengthen the ligament, the muscles around the ankle and ensure protective ankle reflexes to help prevent subsequent sprains [2].

Bracing and taping may allow early return to sport, but normal ankle ligament strength and muscle control will take longer to return and this is why functional rehabilitation is vital. In addition, to help reduce injury risk, modifiable factors should be considered. These include footwear, running surface, training intensity/duration, environmental conditions and ensuring an appropriate warm-up and cool-down period [3, 4].

Some basic tips with regard to modifiable factors include considering the age, mileage and type of shoe. Many sport footwear stores offer a running analysis service, assessing whether you’re in the right footwear.

Uneven surfaces should be avoided to begin with, consider initially training on a treadmill to reduce ankle joint impact and stresses.  Runners can reduce the risk of injury by using training programmes that gradually increase distance or time, and include appropriate rest periods. Appropriate training is essential as 60% of all running injuries are the result of doing “too much, too soon” [5, 6]. In regards to environmental conditions, consider the effect of recent weather on running surfaces, for example is there a point when your ideal trail becomes too muddy or too hard baked?

An appropriate warm-up and cool-down helps ensure the body is prepared, performs and recovers.

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