

Treatment of Chronic Ankle Sprains and foot pain.

A first time, acute ankle sprain should resolve with Physical therapy in 2 – 6 weeks depending on the severity of the injury. However, often patients are sent for physical therapy after they have had recurrent ankle injuries or foot pain. If this is the case, it is important that the treating therapist consider all aspects that may lead up to this chronic condition.

With any lower extremity symptoms it is important to rule out lumbar spine and peripheral nerve involvement. Selected special tests can often appropriately diagnose if there is any nerve injury. Once this has been determined, in addition to treatment at the ankle, the lumbar spine may or may not need to be treated.

Even in the absence of nerve involvement, there is often a correlation between ankle weakness and hip weakness. The hip stabilizes the leg during standing activity, so if it is weak, it can cause excessive motion at the thigh, leg and ankle. It is very important to assess the strength of the entire leg, hip and pelvis and treat whatever deficits are noted.

In addition to lower extremity strength, flexibility can also be an important role in normal ankle and foot function. For example, calf tightness can often lead to excessive forefoot pronation (flat foot), which can lead to conditions such as plantar fasciitis. Tight hip rotators should also be addressed since they can cause the foot to be positioned outward, causing abnormal footwear and discomfort.

These are a few of many factors that can influence chronic ankle and foot problems. In order to provide the best care in helping restore normal function, these issues cannot be ignored. Along with dealing with proximal (closer to the spine) issues, the ankle and foot will be the primary focus of the physical therapy treatment. Common and effective approaches include using manual therapy to restore joint and soft tissue mobility. Also, to reduce pain, inflammation and promote healing, various modalities are utilized such as ultrasound, electrical stimulation, moist heat and cold. Many times, to protect the injured tissue, and to allow adequate healing, tape can be used to give immediate relief of symptoms. Most importantly, getting started and continuing on an appropriate exercise program to restore normal flexibility and strength are essential to alleviating and preventing future problems.

If you have chronic foot or ankle problems please call our office for an evaluation.