
Education

Chronic Ankle Laxity

What is chronic ankle laxity?

Chronic ankle laxity is looseness and instability of the ankle joint.

How does it occur?

Chronic ankle laxity occurs because of previous ankle injuries. Ankles that have become loose or unstable usually have had several severe sprains where ligaments have been torn. The more sprains that you have, the looser your ankle will become. Because of the stretched or torn ligaments, the ankle joint doesn't have its natural support and may twist or sprain more easily.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include:

- looseness of the ankle
- feeling your ankle is giving way
- recurrent swelling
- pain.

How is it diagnosed?

Your provider will ask you about injuries you have had and examine your ankle. The injured ankle may be looser, more swollen, or more painful than your other ankle.

Your provider may take an x-ray of your ankle. You may have a stress x-ray, which means that your ankle joint is stressed while the x-ray is taken. Your provider will look to see if the stress causes the bones to move apart. You may have an MRI or CT scan of your ankle to see it in closer detail.

How is it treated?

At first, chronic ankle laxity is treated with proper rehabilitation exercises. It is very important after an injury to do exercises that work on range of motion, strength, balance, and coordination.

Treatment may also include:

- an ankle brace
- anti-inflammatory medicine (such as ibuprofen)
- ice and elevation.

If your ankle remains loose or unstable, surgery can be done to reconstruct the damaged ligaments. This will make the ankle more stable and stop the feeling that your ankle is giving way.

Without treatment, you may keep injuring and twisting your loose ankle. These repeated twists may eventually cause wear and tear to your ankle joint.

How long will the effects last?

You have ankle laxity because you have previously injured ligaments in your ankle. The laxity will only improve with on-going ankle rehabilitation or surgery.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your normal activities will be determined by how

soon your ankle recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

You may safely return to your normal activities when, starting from the top of the list and progressing to the end, each of the following is true:

- You have full range of motion in the injured ankle compared to the uninjured ankle.
- You have full strength of the injured ankle compared to the uninjured ankle.
- You can walk straight ahead without pain or limping.

How is chronic ankle laxity prevented?

The most important way to prevent chronic ankle problems is by doing proper ankle exercises after an injury. For some people it is important to continue the rehabilitation exercises for a long time after their injury.

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