

# How to assess, then treat painful ankles

health: Flexibility, range of motion activities help you get back on your feet

BY ROB WILLIAMS, SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE SEPTEMBER 18, 2012

Rogers Chocolates

As an ex-soccer and football player, my feet and ankles have taken their fair share of abuse.

I've had broken toes, sprains, strains and numerous other injuries. Even though the majority of these problems are no longer an issue, I still have difficulty with my ankles, mostly due to impingement in the joint at the front of the ankle.

One of my good clients, Jeff McCord, has also been struggling with ankle problems. After a recent accident, Jeff now gets intermittent pain in the front of his ankle joints. Everything might seem fine, then he'll make one wrong move (usually to the rear foot when he is lunging) and he'll get a sharp, stabbing pain at the front of the joint. Other favourite activities such as water skiing are next to impossible due to the anterior shear forces that jam his ankle joints and cause pain.

For Jeff, regular stretching, strengthening and maintenance of the alignment of the bones in the ankle and throughout his body are important to improving the function of this joint.

Fortunately, he gets help with this from some great practitioners. Without this management, muscle imbalance in the lower legs would increase the likelihood of this issue becoming a more chronic, painful condition.

Problems at the ankles and feet frequently arise in people who have had recurring ankle sprains, or other injuries that weren't rehabilitated properly.

Like any other joint in the body, trauma and immobility will compromise function and increase the chance of re-injury.

By bringing awareness to the importance of diagnosis, treatment and prevention, hopefully, I can help many people to manage ankle injuries and stop even more people from ever experiencing one.

When exercising, always remember to perform a progressive warm-up beforehand and be sure to get medical approval before starting a new fitness program.

## Knowledge

Anyone can have ankle issues, and there are many conditions that could be involved. Due to the number of bones in the foot, as well as the need for the ankle joint to move freely in many directions while under the load of your body, it's possible to create serious injuries from small missteps or faulty movements.

Most of us have rolled an ankle. Most of the time, there is no real injury, but serious damage can happen in a split second.

If you have suffered an ankle injury, or struggle through life with ankle pain or immobility, it's definitely worth getting an accurate diagnosis.

With my own ankles, the hyper-mobility in the joints can allow either ankle to become misaligned when doing something as simple as jogging across the street. I know what happens, what causes it, and what can be done about it.

If I ignore the problem, it can last for days or weeks and cause me constant discomfort. Usually, a single joint manipulation by my chiropractor corrects the problem and I don't have any further troubles.

Ankle issues can be more common than you might expect. Many people end up having ankle replacement surgery if the problem is bad enough. Assuming you're not a candidate for surgery, there are numerous approaches to management and rehabilitation that can be very effective and help you to get back on your feet in no time.

Depending on the exact cause of your pain, you may have a slightly different treatment approach. But it's an excellent idea to start with reducing the inflammation.

This is usually done by icing the injured area and possibly taking anti-inflammatory medications.

Sometimes the help of a good physiotherapist or chiropractor is necessary to manage the acute injury, followed by flexibility and range of motion activities, as well as balance and strength exercises.

Fortunately there are advanced products like the Ankle Foot MaXimizer (AFX) to help properly strengthen all of the smaller muscles around the area.

### **Prevention**

I used to have more trouble with my ankles and feet, but this has been reduced since I started to really pay attention to my alignment when standing and walking, and my overall foot function.

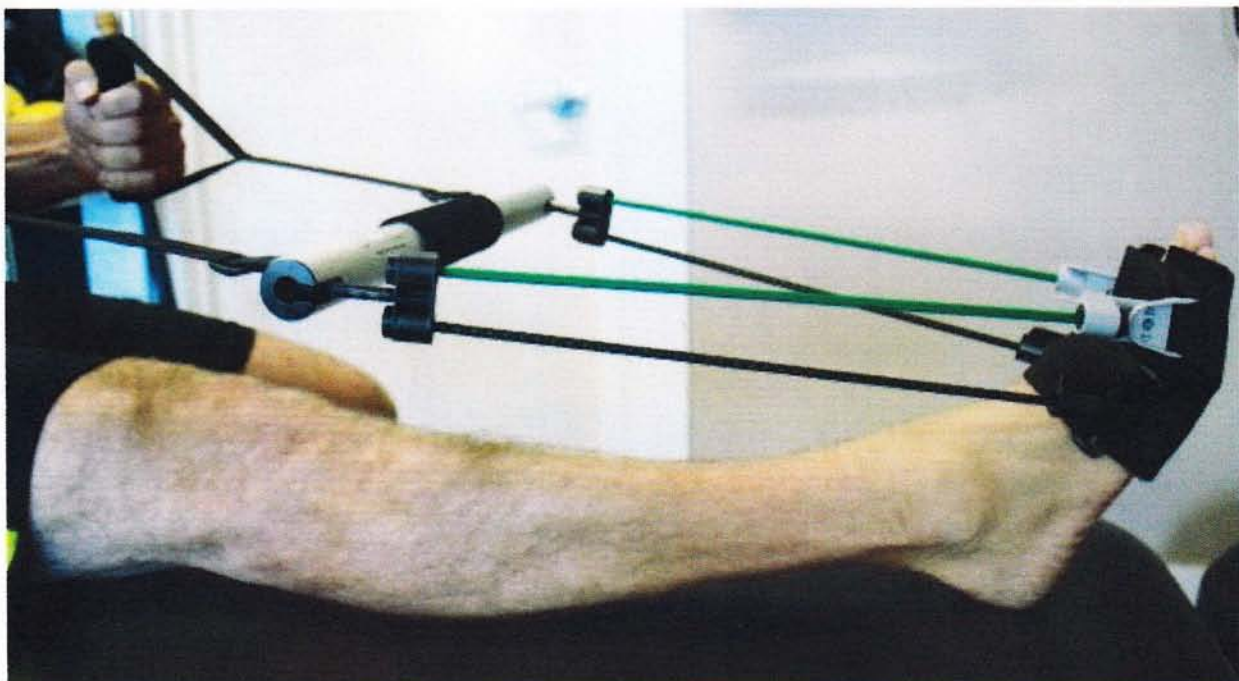
I regularly strengthen the smaller intrinsic muscles in this area, and perform as many barefoot activities as possible. Sometimes these are as simple as doing one-legged toe raises. If you're going to try this, diligent attention to your ankle and foot alignment is essential.

Remember to focus on balance. When I get carried away with too much calf training and not enough training for the muscles in the front of my lower leg, I know I'm always at increased risk for my ankles to act up. Keeping all of the muscles in the lower leg flexible and strong goes a long way.

It's also important to pay attention to your footwear to make sure that old, worn out shoes aren't promoting poor alignment.

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Ankle issues can be more common than people think. Replacement surgery is an option for some, but if you're not a candidate, products like the Ankle Foot MaXimizer help to strengthen the area.