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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Sprained Ankle? Muscles Can Be Damaged As Well

Almost everyone has sprained or “turned their ankle over” at least once. You may remember how your foot turned inwards and a sharp pain was immediately felt at the outside of the ankle and lower leg. The usual result is swelling and bruising, indicative of damaged ligaments, tendons, and muscles. Today, I will discuss what muscles may become injured during an ankle sprain. Next week, I will cover what ligaments are usually damaged.

To locate the muscles involved, bend your foot and toes upward toward your knee and outward toward the outside of your lower leg at the same time. While holding your foot in this position, you will notice a slight bulging of the muscles at the outside of your leg, just below your knee. These muscles are called “peroneal longus and peroneus brevis” (see diagram). When these muscles contract or shorten, they pull the outside of the foot upwards and outwards as described above. When you sprain your ankle, the opposite movement occurs forcefully – the foot and ankle turn inwards and downwards. This movement will stretch the peroneus muscles and their tendons (the tendons are what connect the muscles to the bones of the foot). In a serious ankle sprain, you may notice swelling, tenderness to touch, and bruising over the muscles. There will be microscopic tearing and even larger scale tearing of the muscle tissue that will require treatment and rehabilitation. If left untreated, scar tissue will form and the muscle tissue will lose flexibility and strength. Even if left untreated, the pain and swelling in the ankle and lower leg will eventually subside. However, if the muscles are not treated and rehabilitated properly, they will not be able to perform their role of supporting the ankle and preventing it from rolling over or spraining again. This is one of the reasons why people who sprain their ankle once and return to their sport or activity as soon as the pain subsides may be more prone for it to happen again.

If you or someone you know is playing a running sport (such as soccer, rugby, soft ball, etc), it is wise to take preventative measures toward reducing the number of ankle sprains that occur. Strengthening and stretching exercises will help and are very easy to do. To stretch the muscles, you simply sit on the floor, bend one knee, and grab the ankle. Then, with your hands, bend your ankle inwards and downwards until you feel a slight stretch at the outside of the lower leg. Hold this stretch for ten seconds and

repeat five times. Do the same with the other leg. To strengthen the muscles, you need to sit on the floor with your legs straight. Using a three foot piece of thin rubber banding, tie one end around your foot and the other end to the leg of a couch or heavy table. Move your body away from the couch or table until the banding is just tight. Now, when you bend your foot upward and outward by contracting the muscles, the banding will offer resistance and make the muscles work harder, eventually strengthening them.

If you are having trouble understanding the stretch or exercise, or if you have sprained your ankle in the past and did not rehabilitate it, please call my office and I will be happy to give you some advice or further explanation.

