

Exercise injury prevention: Protecting your ankles

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(HealthDay)—Guarding against injury means increasing both flexibility and strength. Target the muscles that support your ankles to protect your joints by strength-training two or three times a week on alternating days and always after you've warmed up.

Start by using a resistance band to work [calf muscles](#). Sit on the floor, with legs straight. Wrap the center of the band around your right [foot](#) and hold the ends taut in both hands. Flex toes, hold and return to start. Complete your reps. Next, point your toes, hold and return to start, adjusting the tautness of the bands in your hands as needed. Complete reps, then repeat the entire sequence with your left foot.

Now move to calf raises using your own body weight for resistance. Hold the back of a chair or face a wall and place your hands against it for balance. Lift your left foot behind you, heel toward your butt, placing all your weight on your right leg. Now lift just your right heel off the floor. Hold for three seconds, then lower. Complete your reps, then switch legs and repeat.

For both exercises, start with one set of eight reps and build to three sets of 10 to 12 reps. To avoid injury, always build up endurance gradually, no matter what the activity, and get instruction if needed so that you always use the proper technique.

Follow strength training with stretches. Take your [ankles](#) through a full range of motion by using your toes to trace the alphabet. Sit on a high stool so your feet won't touch the floor. Start with your right foot and, leading with the big toe, pretend to write each letter from A to Z in the air. Use small movements—only your foot and [ankle](#) move. Repeat with the left foot. Note: You can do this stretch every day, after any type of exercise that warms up your body, even a five-minute walk.

More information: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has more [exercises](#) and stretches to add to your ankle routine.

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