

Chronic Ankle Instability

What Is Chronic Ankle Instability?

Chronic ankle instability is a condition characterized by a recurring “giving way” of the outer (lateral) side of the ankle. This condition often develops after repeated ankle sprains. Usually the “giving way” occurs while walking or doing other activities, but it can also happen when you’re just standing. Many athletes, as well as others, suffer from chronic ankle instability.

People with chronic ankle instability often complain of:

- A repeated turning of the ankle, especially on uneven surfaces or when participating in sports
- Persistent (chronic) discomfort and swelling
- Pain or tenderness
- The ankle feeling wobbly or unstable

Causes

Chronic ankle instability usually develops following an ankle sprain that has not adequately healed or was not rehabilitated completely. When you sprain your ankle, the connective tissues (ligaments) are stretched or torn. The ability to balance is often affected. Proper rehabilitation is needed to strengthen the muscles around the ankle and “retrain” the tissues within the ankle that affect balance. Failure to do so may result in repeated ankle sprains.

Repeated ankle sprains often cause – and perpetuate – chronic ankle instability. Each subsequent sprain leads to further weakening (or stretching) of the ligaments, resulting in greater instability and the likelihood of developing additional problems in the ankle.

Diagnosis

In evaluating and diagnosing your condition, the foot and ankle surgeon will ask you about any previous ankle injuries and instability. Then he or she will examine your ankle to check for tender areas, signs of swelling, and instability of your ankle as shown in the illustration. X-rays or other imaging studies may be helpful in further evaluating the ankle.

Call to schedule your appointment today.

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