

Have you ever gone over/out on your ankle? Apart from being extremely painful, it can lead to withdrawals from games and long periods on the injured list. We often see this in handballers due to the fast paced, multi-directional, quick reaction, nature of the game.

Very few of us pay a lot of attention to building strength or increasing mobility in our ankles. With the foot being the ground contact force, the ankle is the most important joint in determining how that foot reacts as we move about the court. During any given game, there are hundreds of movements happening around the ankle joint in multiplanar directions – lateral, medial, anterior, even posteriorly. On the outer side of the ankle, the most commonly injured, you have ligaments and tendons stabilising the joint. When the ligaments, in particular, are unable to adequately stabilise the joint, and the joint receives a force, you usually end up with an Eversion sprain. To cause this the force is usually from a lateral or anterior direction. What tends to happen is that as your foot plants on the ground, the force continues laterally or anteriorly, or both, and the ligaments are unable to react in the way that they should. As a result there is excess movement in the joint and the ligaments get stretched. By the way, ligaments don't stretch very well!

We see a higher incidence of lateral ankle sprains in joints that are less mobile, so increasing your ankle mobility should be a priority. The benefits of an ankle mobility and proprioception (balance) programme is more than to simply reduce the risk of injury. As a handballer, mobile, strong ankles create the platform for you to attack every shot and react aggressively in every defence. If you feel that your ankle needs more mobility, start by writing the alphabet with your foot multiple times during the day. Working on your calf strength will help increase the strength of your ankle. Working on your balance will improve your proprioception. Below we show you a quick way to test the mobility of your ankle joint, along with some simple exercises to improve your strength and proprioception.

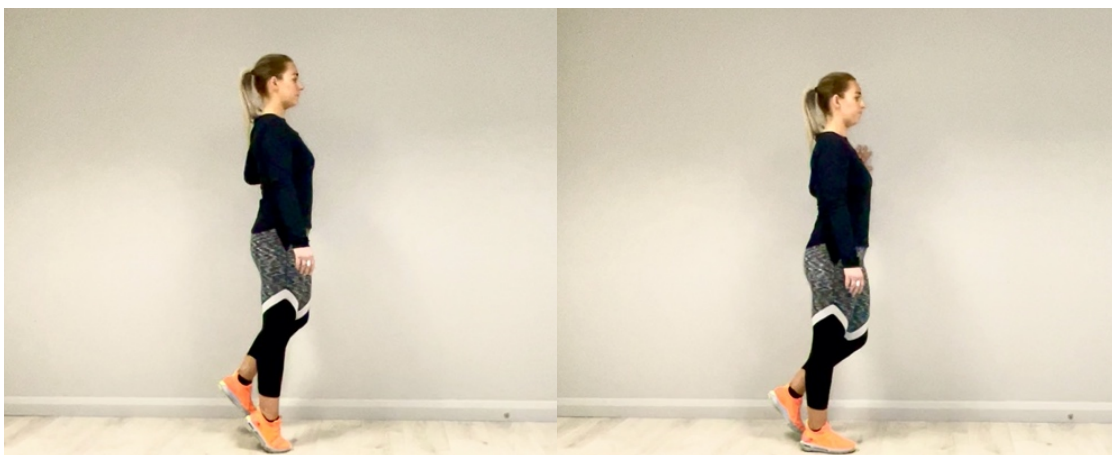
Ankle Mobility Test

- Stand close to the wall with your toes about $\frac{3}{4}$ of your foot size away from the wall.
- Keeping your heel on the floor, flex your knee forward towards the wall.
- Try to touch the wall with your knee. If you can do this then you have good ankle mobility in an anterior/posterior direction.
- If you feel your heel lifts off the floor, or you can't touch the wall with your knee due to tightness at the front of the foot, you need to improve your ankle mobility.



Single Leg Calf Raises

- Stand with your side close to a wall with your fingertips touching the wall for balance.
- Stand on your right leg only, and slowly push up on your toes.
- Hold momentarily at the top and then slowly return to the floor. Make sure that it is the same pace up and down – slow and controlled.
- Repeat 3 sets of 10 on each side with 20 seconds recovery between each set.



Multi-directional Single Leg Balance

- Stand on your right leg with hands on the hips.
- Reach your left toe forward as far as you can. Return to centre.
- Then reach your toe back as far as possible, out to the left as far as possible, and then behind and to the right as far as possible.
- Try to stay on 1 leg throughout the exercise by not letting your moving heel touch the floor.
- Repeat on the opposite side. Do 6 reps each side.



Tommy Gallagher is a Registered Physical Therapist who specialises in Elite Athlete Injury treatment and Rehabilitation. With 15 years' experience working in Gaelic games, Golf, Athletics, Rugby, and Football, his main clinic in Donegal helps athletes of all ages recover from injury and come back fitter and stronger. His methods of finding the source of pain and weakness means that you are working with the person the Professionals turn to in their time of need. For more information or if you would like to see us cover a specific topic over the coming months, send an email to tommy@tommygallagher.ie or call 074 9168788

Avril McNamee works alongside Tommy as a Senior Rehabilitation Coach. As a successful Handballer herself, she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to help players maximise their physical potential on the court. All programmes are individually designed to improve a player's mobility, speed and power, in a way that they can transfer into their game.

