

Ankle Strength Exercises

PREVENT ANKLE INJURIES

Coach Oliete · 3 times a week, before or after practice · Rest 30 to 45 seconds between sets

Strong feet and ankles handle rocks, roots, curbs, and tired legs at the end of a race. These exercises build the balance and strength that keep your ankle from rolling. Do them barefoot or in socks when you can. Start with the no-equipment exercises. Add the equipment exercises when you have the gear.

Why it matters beyond injury prevention: These exercises also help protect your Achilles tendon and lower your chance of shin splints and arch (plantar fascia) pain. A stronger calf and foot gives you a more powerful push-off, which helps you run faster on hills and in your finishing kick. Better balance also means more control on downhills, trails, and uneven ground.

NO EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Single-Leg Balance

3 sets of 30 sec, each foot

Stand on one foot with a slight bend in your knee. Once that is easy, close your eyes or stand on a folded towel or pillow. Balance training is one of the best ways to prevent ankle sprains.

Balance Reach

3 sets of 6 reaches, each leg

Stand on one foot. With the other foot, reach and lightly tap the floor in front of you, out to the side, and behind you, then come back to center. Keep your standing knee over your toes.

Calf Raises

3 sets of 15 straight-knee + 3 sets of 15 bent-knee

Rise up onto your toes, then lower slowly for 3 seconds. Do your straight-knee sets, then your sets with knees bent a little (this works the deeper calf muscle). When it gets easy, do them on one foot.

Heel and Toe Walks

3 sets of 20 steps each

Walk on your heels with your toes pointed up, then walk on your tiptoes. This builds the muscles on the front and back of your lower leg.

Arch Lifts (Short Foot)

3 sets of 10, hold 5 sec

Stand or sit with your foot flat. Without curling your toes, pull the ball of your foot toward your heel so your arch lifts up. Hold, then relax. This trains the small muscles that support your arch.

Pogo Hops

3 sets of 20 hops

Do small, quick hops on both feet, staying on the balls of your feet with stiff, bouncy ankles. When it is easy, hop on one foot. Add this only once the other exercises feel easy.

WITH EQUIPMENT

Equipment needed: a towel, about 10 small balls (marbles or bouncy balls) and a cup, a resistance band, and a step or stair.

Towel Scrunches

3 sets of 30 sec, each foot

Sit with a towel flat on the floor under your bare foot. Use your toes to scrunch the towel toward you, then push it back out.

Small Ball Pickups

3 sets of 10 balls, each foot

Put about 10 small balls (marbles or bouncy balls) on the floor next to a cup. Pick up one ball at a time with your toes and drop it in the cup. This builds toe and arch strength.

Band Ankle Out and In

3 sets of 15 each way, each foot

Sit with your legs straight and a resistance band looped around your foot. Push your foot outward against the band, then inward. The outward push is the most important one for stopping rolled ankles.

Step Calf Raises

3 sets of 12

Stand with the balls of your feet on a step and your heels hanging off. Hold a rail. Rise up high, then lower slowly until your heels drop just below the step. Later, do them on one foot.

Tip: Quality beats speed. Move slowly and with control. You should feel these in your muscles, not as pain in your joint. If your ankle hurts during or after running, tell Coach Oliete.

Disclaimer: Coach Oliete is not a doctor, and this sheet is not medical advice. Only you (the runner) or a doctor can judge whether these exercises are safe for you to do. If you are unsure, check with a doctor first.