Ankle injuries are common and can lead to chronic pain and stiffness if not properly managed. The most common ankle injury is a sprain of the ligaments on the outside of the ankle. Proper care of an ankle injury includes limiting/addressing swelling, increasing range of motion of the ankle, and increasing strength in the muscles surrounding the ankle. The following treatment options should be utilized to optimize healing and recovery:

**Rest:** Immediately following injury, the ankle should be rested to prevent further injury to the joint. If the injury is bad enough, this may mean using crutches so you’re not putting weight on the ankle.

**Ice/Anti-inflammatory:** The ankle should be iced following the exercise program to limit any irritation from the activity. Also, the ankle can be iced at the end of the day or anytime you have been on it a lot. Ice should be applied for 20-30 minutes. In addition, anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen can be taken to reduce inflammation. Doses should never exceed that recommended by your doctor.

**Home Exercises:**

**Stretching/Range of Motion:**

Following an ankle injury, swelling and/or muscle tightness can cause a significant decrease in the range of motion of the ankle. Movement of the ankle helps to move swelling out of the joint and stretching tight muscles helps to increase flexibility. This is important for increasing the joint’s range of motion.

**Alphabet Exercise:**

This exercise will help you to move your ankle in all directions, helping to move swelling out. Sit in a chair and cross you injured leg over the non-injured leg. With your big toe of the injured ankle, trace all the letters of the alphabet in the air, moving your entire ankle and foot. This should be repeated 3-5 times and can be done in capital letters, lower-case letters, or cursive to break up the monotony. This exercise is shown in figure 1.

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**Figure 1**
**Strengthening:**

**Theraband Exercises**

The following exercises should be performed using a theraband. This is a stretchy rubber band which allows the motions to be performed against resistance. Therabands come in different colors according to how much resistance they provide. As you progress and the exercises become easy, you can switch to a different colored band that provides more resistance.

**Plantarflexion:**

Sitting with your injured leg straight out in front of you, grasp one end of the theraband in each hand. Loop the theraband around the ball of your injured foot. Push down on the theraband as if you were pushing on the gas pedal of your car, as shown in figure 4. Push as far as you can and relax slowly. Do ______ sets of ______ repetitions.

**Dorsiflexion:**

Attach the theraband to the leg of a table in a loop. Sit facing the table leg with your injured leg straight out in front of you. Put your injured foot in the loop and pull the band back towards you as shown in figure 5. Pull toward you as far as you can and relax slowly. Do ______ sets of ______ repetitions.

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**Calf Stretches:**

The calf muscles may become tight following an ankle injury due to limited use. It is important to stretch the calf to regain its flexibility. When stretching the calf, you should feel tension, but not pain. If the stretch is painful, ease off until the pain is gone. There are two muscles in the calf that should be stretched. The gastrocnemius is stretched with the knee straight as shown in figure 2. With the leg to be stretched behind you, keep the heel on the floor and the knee straight and lean forward against the wall. The soleus is stretched the same way, but with the knee bent as shown in figure 3. With the leg to be stretched behind you, keep the heel on the floor, bend the knee, and lean forward against the wall. Hold each stretch for ______ seconds and repeat ______ times. Do these stretches before and after your exercises.
**Inversion:**

With the theraband still attached to the table in a loop, sit with your injured leg straight out in front of you with the outside of your foot facing the table leg. Place your injured leg inside the loop and pull the theraband toward your other leg as shown in figure 6. Be sure that the movement is occurring at the ankle. Your leg should remain stationary and shouldn’t rotate inward. Pull the band inward as far as you can and relax slowly. Do ______ sets of ______ repetitions.

**Eversion:**

With the theraband still attached to the table leg in a loop, sit with your injured leg straight out in front of you with the inside of your foot facing the table leg. Place your injured leg inside the loop and pull the theraband away from your other leg as shown in figure 7. As with inversion, be sure that the movement occurs at the ankle and that the leg remains stationary without rotating outward. Pull the band as far as you can and relax slowly. Do ______ sets of ______ repetitions.

**Toe Raises:**

This exercise helps to develop functional strength and stability. Using a table for balance, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Go up on your toes as high as you can as shown in figure 8, then relax slowly. Do ______ sets of ______ repetitions. As this exercise gets easier, switch to single-leg toe raises on the injured leg as shown in figure 9.

**Single Leg Knee Bends:**

Stand on your painful leg. Holding onto something for balance, bend your knee to a 20-30 degree MAX bend as shown in Figure 10. Be sure the leg is not rotating inward by keeping the kneecap above the second toe. Hold that position for 5 seconds and then straighten your knee back up. When the exercise gets easier and less painful, you can increase the time you hold the squat to 10 seconds. As you progress, you can eventually work up to 15 seconds and then 20 seconds. Do _____ sets of _____ repetitions of this exercise.