

Chronic Lateral Ankle Instability

After treatment, a significant percentage (probably between 20% and 30%) of patients who have suffered lateral ankle ligament injury (see [Ankle Sprain](#)) experience chronic (frequent or persistent) ankle pain, stiffness, or swelling, or even instances of the ankle "giving way" (a sudden failure to support the body weight) when walking or standing. Chronic lateral ankle instability is a common problem among many athletes.

Mechanical instability refers to physical weakening or looseness (laxity) of the ligaments. That is, the instability occurs because rehabilitation and healing from the previous injury have been insufficient.

Functional instability refers to a subjective feeling of giving way, instability, or recurrent sprains. Functional instability is not fully understood. However, it is associated with muscle weakness of the peroneal muscles.

Causes of Chronic Lateral Ankle Instability?

The causes of this condition are related to previous ankle injuries and subsequent incomplete rehabilitation. Patients who have experienced one ankle injury are more likely to experience others. The ankle sprain pain leaves, but the muscles become weak due to pain and inactivity and need to be strengthened.

While mechanical instability is related to laxity of the ligaments, the causes of functional instability are not as well understood. It is believed that the problem may be a combination of one or more factors related to nerves, muscles, or mechanical factors (joints and ligaments).

Symptoms of Chronic Lateral Ankle Instability?

- Recurring ankle instability, especially in high heels
- Difficulty walking on uneven ground without ankle giving way
- Recurring instances of ankle sprain (pain, stiffness, and swelling)



Treatment

Conservative treatments include:

- Taping techniques.
- Ankle supports. Several commercial products are available.
- Orthotic techniques. Again, several commercial products are available.
- Strengthening exercises
- Functional rehabilitation, aimed at restoring range of motion and strengthening of muscles

If conservative techniques are not successful:

- [Ankle Replacement Surgery](#)
- Ankle arthroscopy, a surgical procedure to visualize, diagnose and treat problems inside a joint

