

## THE SPORTS DOCTOR - Ankle Braces- Pros and Cons

In sports and non sports alike, one of the most common injuries is ankle sprains and strains of varying degrees. So much so that in many sports "routine" tape has a tradition as long as the sport. Using tape, of course, takes time and a knowledgeable trainer or person to apply.

For many years there have been countless braces available to allow the athlete the ability to replace the tape with a more convenient approach. Many of the serious volleyball and basketball players I see are required to use specific braces by their coaches or trainers, and football is often the same.

Trainers and therapists as well as doctors have long debated the pros and cons of ankle braces so I thought some insight would be helpful. First and foremost it's important to know that ROUTINE ankle strengthening and balance exercises are crucial. I can't tell you how often I see athletes in all sports who, unless they've had a previous ankle injury, don't routinely strengthen this very important area. Or, once that ankle injury is rehabbed, the exercises stop. BIG MISTAKE! I've never seen an athlete with "over developed" ankles so paying real attention makes great sense.

Rubber bands, balance boards, mini-trampolines are examples of simple pieces of equipment that can really strengthen all structures around these vital joints. Have your trainer or therapist instruct your or your young athlete in these exercises. If the player has a history of ankle problems then it's important to determine what type of brace is effective and comfortable or is the tape more effective. I have the athlete work closely with the trainer or therapist to make these decisions. If there is that history of problems, we're also paying a lot of attention to those important factors of foot type and mechanics-- we commonly have great success using orthotics with either tape or braces when foot imbalance is contributing to persistent ankle instability.

The overall consensus seems to be that both tape and braces are helpful in both dealing with ongoing problems as well as PREVENTION of ankle sprains in many instances so if you or your kids are playing these running, jumping, direction changing sports--- PAY ATTENTION!

Dr. Robert Weil is a sports podiatrist from Naperville with an office in Aurora. You can hear him on his weekly radio show at 6:30 p.m. Thursdays on 90.9-FM. Contact him at [drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com](mailto:drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com) and check out his website [www.sportsdoctorradio.com](http://www.sportsdoctorradio.com).