

Step up your foot exercises

Strengthening your feet and ankles can have an excellent effect in sports.

First, it will reduce chances for sprained ankles, the most common of injuries. Second, it can improve speed, balance and performance.

Over the last 25 years, I've seen some of the world's best athletes in all sports and I've never seen an athlete with "over-developed ankles." It is usually a weak link and, as noted above, ankle injuries are all too common.

The body's foundation and base of support is the feet, but often feet and ankle training are neglected unless it's rehabilitating an injury. It makes much more sense to strengthen and train these areas routinely and proactively.

Old routines usually involved tape or braces for ankles, but that was mostly for athletes with previous problems. These methods could be helpful but often left out strength and balance exercises. However, adding these to any training program for any sport can be really beneficial. Strong and stable feet and ankles helps prevent shin splints as well as knee, hip and back problems.

So often we'll see young athletes totally concerned about their bench press or arm and shoulder power. After all, these are the "show muscles." But these same athletes sometimes

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have difficulty balancing on one foot. They need to be educated about including foot, ankle strength and stability exercises for functional strength - the ability to move with power and speed, change direction, stop and start with balance.

These abilities can success-

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the joints of the ankles, knees, hips and spine.

When these types of tram or balance board exercises are performed, I like to call it "instability training." Creating imbalance works those stabilizers. Changing positions on the tram or boards will work different areas. Rubber bands or tubing are great to work all of the ankle's ranges of motion.

Moving the ankle up and down, side to side and in and out can strengthen all the lower leg muscles. Small muscles of the foot, arch and Achilles also will benefit.

Slow, deliberate movements are best when using rubber bands. The bands are available with various resistance. Start light and progress gradually. Getting some instruction from a sports

fully be trained with simple, inexpensive programs. The use of rubber bands, mini-trams and balance boards are examples of great ways to work all of the foot, ankle and lower leg areas.

Balance work also will improve knee, hip and back stability and strength. Try standing one foot at a time on a mini-trampoline for 15 to 30 seconds. All of the stabilizer muscles in your whole body are worked. These stabilizer small muscles help protect all

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medicine physician, therapist or athletic trainer is wise. Proper form and technique are always important.

These types of exercises are simple and safe for almost all ages, but don't let their simplicity fool you. Top athletes in all sports have benefited greatly.

By the way - I got to see Naperville's own U.S. figure skating champion and Olympian Evan Lysacek last week at an exhibition. He was fabulous, landing three or four triple jumps with great artistry. I've worked with Evan since he was 11. He's had orthotics in his skates since then, and he's still strengthening his feet and ankles.

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