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Original article

THEORETICAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE ANKLE SPRAIN

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Abstract

Problem statement. Acute ankle injury is one of the most common musculoskeletal injuries. Ankle injuries have been identified as a primary injury concern, highlighting the need for injury prevention programmes to be implemented in an attempt to reduce their incidence and severity.

The aim of the research: The risk factors that involve the appearance of the sprain are: intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic risk factors for sprains include the following: previous sprain; sex; height and weight; limb dominance; anatomic foot type and foot size; generalized joint laxity; anatomic alignment, ankle-joint laxity, and range of motion of the ankle-foot complex; muscle strength; muscle reaction time; and postural sway. Extrinsic risk factors that have been investigated through prospective studies include bracing and taping, shoe type, and the duration and intensity of competition and player position. Treatment for a sprained ankle depends on the severity of injury. The treatment goals are to reduce pain and swelling, promote healing of the ligament, and restore function of the ankle. Treatments for acute ankle injuries includes exercise therapy, immobilization and aquatic therapy.

Conclusion. Identification of injury risk factors, mechanisms and treatment can help to implement tailored injury prevention measures for both sexes at all age and skill levels.

Key words: ankle sprain, risk factors, prevention, recovery, treatment.

Introduction

Acute ankle injury is one of the most common musculoskeletal injuries, say most specialist, including Polzer H., et al., (2012).

Bratu (2013), define that “sprain is a joint microtrauma that occurs under the action of divergent forces that exceed physiological limits of joint stability, but do not change the anatomical relationships of osteocartilaginous joint surface”.

Farzin Halabchi, Mohammad Hassabi, (2020) estimated that almost 85% of ankle sprain involve the lateral ligaments. In almost 65% of cases, isolated injuries of the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL) and in 20% there are injuries of the ATFL and calcaneofibular posterior ligament are unusual, (Ferran, Maffulli, 2006). There remain 15% involving ankle sprain at the syndesmotic and medial level after Doherty C., et al., (2014). For this form of sprain, Vuurberg et al., (2018) started that a syndesmotic sprain of the ankle is a lesion of one or more ligaments that compromise the distal tibiofibular junction and is commonly known as “high sprain of the ankle”.

Etiology. The most common cause of ankle sprain is inversion injury that occurs when the ankle is rotated outwards and the sole of the foot is brought inward. This

results in the stretching or rupture of the ligament between the talus and the fibula. It is the most common mechanism by which ankle sprain occurs.

In an inversion injury, the ankle rotates inward and the sole of the foot outward, injuring the ligaments on the inside of the joint. Ligament injuries range from simple stretches to partial or complete ruptures. These are manifested in the following degrees: Grade I represents the stretching of the ligaments, showing a slight sensitivity, edema (swelling of the ankle) and stiffness. There is pain when walking. Grade II is a partial injury of the ligaments with moderate pain, edema and bruising. Injured areas are sensitive to palpation and there is pain while walking. Grade III is complete rupture of the affected ligament accompanied by edema and severe bruising. Most of the time walking is impossible, with severe pain, although the initial pain may immediately decrease in intensity.

The risk factors that involve the appearance of the sprain, according to Bruce D., et al. (2002), are: intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors.

The *intrinsic risk factors* for sprains of the lateral ankle ligaments investigated through prospective

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studies include the following: previous sprain; sex; height and weight; limb dominance; anatomic foot type and foot size; generalized joint laxity; anatomic alignment, ankle-joint laxity, and range of motion of the ankle-foot complex; muscle strength; muscle reaction time; and postural sway. *Extrinsic risk factors* that have been investigated through prospective studies include bracing and taping, shoe type, and the duration and intensity of competition and player position.

Previous Sprain. Perhaps the most frequently studied risk factor for lateral ankle-ligament sprains is a previous sprain of this complex. This is based on the fact that disruption of a ligament compromises an important biomechanical stabilizer and creates partial deafferentation of the ankle. Roos, et al. (2017) and Attenborough, et al. (2014) mention in their research that the high incidence rate of acute ankle sprains is due in part to the frequency of reinjury after an initial ankle sprain. Authors of a systematic review (Attenborough et al. 2014) noted that a substantial proportion of all acute ankle sprains sustained during sports were recurrent. For example, 46% of acute ankle sprains that occurred in volleyball, 43% in American football, 28% in basketball, and 19% in soccer were recurrent injuries.

Other researchers identified the proportion of recurrent ankle sprains as 12% to 47%, Bridgman SA., et al. (2003), Kemler, et al. (2016), Pasanen, et al. (2017).

The literature is divided with regard to whether or not a previous sprain has an influence on the risk for a future sprain.

Sex. Hosea et al. (2000), affirm that the disparity of ankle-ligament sprains between the sexes appears to be much smaller in contrast with the incidence of knee injuries, particularly disruption of the anterior cruciate ligament, which is considerably greater for female athletes in comparison with male athletes after Arendt, Dick (1995) and Malone et al., (1993).

Female athletes were at 25% increased risk of suffering a grade I ankle sprain compared with male athletes; however, the relative risk between the sexes for the more serious grade II and III sprains, ankle fractures, and syndesmotic sprains was not significantly different. In their research Harrer et al., (1998) they found that in addition, for both male and female athletes, the relative risk of suffering an ankle sprain doubled as the level of competition increased from high school to the collegiate level. This interesting finding is in contrast to anterior cruciate ligament tears, which increase substantially with increasing levels of competition for female athletes but not for males.

Height and Weight. In accordance with Bruce D. Beynnon, et al., (2002), height and weight have been implicated as risk factors: when an athlete is in an at-risk position for inversion ankle trauma, an increase in either height or weight proportionally increases the magnitude of inversion torque that must be resisted by the ligaments and muscles that span the ankle complex. Watson, (1999) found that male soccer athletes who sustained ankle sprains had greater height than those who did not.

Limb Dominance. Limb dominance has been implicated as a risk factor for lower extremity trauma because most athletes place a greater demand on their dominant limb, so Ekstrand and Gillquist, (1983) noted that the dominant leg sustained significantly more ankle injuries in male soccer players, with 92% of ankle injuries affecting the dominant leg.

Anatomic Foot Type and Foot Size. Barrett et al., (1993), found that the anatomic foot type (pronated, supinated, or neutral) does not appear to be a risk factor for ankle sprains, however, the classification system that characterizes anatomic foot type as pronated, supinated, or neutral may be inadequate for identifying abnormalities in foot biomechanics.

Generalized Joint Laxity, Ankle-Joint Laxity, Anatomic Alignment, and Range of Motion of the Ankle-Foot Complex. There are studies of this problem which affirmed that the laxity of the ankle joint is not a risk factor (Barrett et al., 1993), and some studies which say contrary (Baumhauer et al., 1995).

Beynnon et al., (2001) in a study of collegiate soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey athletes revealed that ankle injuries were more common among women with increased tibial varum and calcaneal eversion range of motion, while no such relationship was found for men. Thus, alignment of the hindfoot in combination with the lower extremity is important when evaluating risk factors for inversion injury of the ankle.

Ankle dorsiflexion and plantar-flexion range of motion does not appear to be related to the risk of suffering an ankle sprain among collegiate soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey athletes, say the same authors. Wiesler et al., (1996) found that the ankle range of motion is also not associated with injury in ballet and modern dancers.

Muscle Strength and Muscle-Reaction Time. Although most would consider it intuitive that lower extremity strength is related to the risk of suffering an ankle-ligament sprain. Both the force and temporal response of the muscles that span the ankle are important to consider, (Watson, 1999). Muscle-reaction times for both modes of perturbation were not

predictive of injury in men; however, an interesting trend occurred in women.

Postural Sway There are studies that confirm the importance of postural sway and risk for ankle sprain injury and there are studies with contrary opinions.

Extrinsic factors. Ankle Bracing and Taping. Review of the prospective studies of the effect of bracing on reduction in ankle sprains revealed a consistent finding: athletes with a history of ankle sprains who use a brace or tape experienced a lower incidence of ankle sprains (McKay et al., 2001).

Shoe Type Another extrinsic risk factor that has undergone investigation is shoe type. One of the first studies revealed that the incidence and severity of knee and ankle injuries in high school football players were reduced when the length of the shoe cleats was reduced (Torg 1971). In contrast, 2 prospective studies have shown no correlation between shoe type and ankle sprains for military trainees and basketball players (Milgrom et al., 1991), (Barrett et al. 1993).

Duration and Intensity of Competition and Player Position. Although several prospective studies have recorded exposure data, (McKay et al., 2001), (Barrett et al. 1993), (Beynon et al., 2001) only Ekstrand & Gillquist 1983 and Arnason et al., 1996, have separated their data by practices and games. Ekstrand et al., 1983, found that twice as many injuries occurred in soccer games as in practice, and there was no difference in risk of ankle injury among player positions. Arnason et al., 1966, reported 4,4 ankle sprains per 1000 hours of participation in soccer games and only 0,1 sprains per 1000 hours of practice. Similar to Ekstrand et al., 1983, Sitler et al., 1994, noted no difference in risk of ankle injury among basketball player positions, (Kerkhoffs, et al., 2012).

Time for recovery. According with Thompson, et al., (2017), one-third of individuals who sustain an acute lateral ankle ligament sprain suffer significant disability due to pain, functional instability, mechanical instability or recurrent sprain after recovery plateaus at 1 to 5 years post injury. The identification of early prognostic factors associated with poor recovery may provide an opportunity for early-targeted intervention and improve outcome.

The same authors specify that in their studies they noted that several authors specify that recovery can be achieved in 2 weeks, certainly taking into account the degree. The age and activity of the patients, and others authors specify that the recovery could not be performed in 2 weeks because non-recovery at 4 weeks was predicted by the combination of three baseline prognostic factors (Ankle Function Score-AFS ≤ 35 , higher 0-10 severity grading by a doctor, and higher palpation / ligament stress test score) with

a sensitivity and specificity of 81% and 80%, respectively (de Bie et al., 1997).

In the same study, the authors cite O'Connor et al., (2013), which reported that lower subjective ankle function at 4 weeks was significantly associated with the baseline prognostic factors of greater age ($\beta = -.32$), more severe injury grade ($\beta = -.23$), and poorer weight bearing status ($\beta = -.34$). O'Connor et al., (2013), found that greater age ($\beta = -.26$), poorer weight bearing status ($\beta = -.23$), and non-inversion injury mechanism ($\beta = -.25$) were prognostic factors for poorer subjective function at 4 months followup.

Treatment. Treatment for a sprained ankle depends on the severity of injury. The treatment goals are to reduce pain and swelling, promote healing of the ligament, and restore function of the ankle.

The use of ice and compression in the inflammatory phase after acute ankle injuries.

In the event of an acute ankle injury, the effect of ice (cryotherapy) is unclear. Bleakley et al., (2004). Ice combined with exercise therapy has a positive effect on the swelling in comparison with heat application, (Coté et al., 1988). The effectiveness of compression shows conflicting results. Intermittent application of ice has a significant effect on short term pain reduction (difference ± 1 cm in a visual analogue scale) in comparison with standard application of ice.

There are no indications that the use of ice only is effective to reduce swelling, increase function and reduce pain at rest in the event of an acute ankle injury, (Bleakley et al., 2006). The use of ice and compression, in combination with rest and elevation, is an important aspect of treatment in the acute phase of lateral ankle injury (LAI).

Analgesic and anti-inflammatory medications

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Oral and topical nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are commonly prescribed to decrease pain and inflammation in the acute phase of ankle sprain (Struijs & Kerkhoffs 2015).

Current studies indicate that the consumption of topical or oral NSAIDs in young and healthy athletes cause short-term improvement of pain and swelling (< 2 wk) without considerably raising the risk of unfavorable events compared with placebo (Vuurberg et al., 2018).

Regarding the selected NSAIDs for ankle sprains, a few studies have shown superior results for diclofenac at first and second days compared with piroxicam and ibuprofen for pain reduction in mild to severe acute sprains and equal side effects (Morán 1990).

Immobilisation after acute ankle injuries.

Research from a systematic review (randomised

controlled trials (RCTs), N=2184) showed that a longer period of immobilisation in a lower leg cast (minimum of 4 weeks) is less effective compared with different functional treatments, (Kerkhoffs et al., 2002). However, due to great variation in methodological quality, the conclusions from this review should be interpreted with some caution. Recent evidence from RCT (N=584) states that a short period of plaster immobilisation (10 days) or rigid support for reduction of pain and swelling can still be considered of help in the treatment of LAI (Lamb et al., 2009).

A short period of plaster immobilization or similar rigid support facilitating a rapid decrease of pain and swelling can be helpful in the acute phase of the treatment of LAI.

Functional treatment for 4 to 6 weeks is preferable to immobilisation in a cast.

Optimal functional treatment after acute ankle injuries. A systematic review (9 RCTs, N=892) investigated the effect of different functional treatments for acute ankle injuries such as exercise therapy and immobilization by means of tape or brace (Kerkhoffs et al., 2002). Elastic bandages gave fewer complications than tape, but was associated with a delayed return to work and sports. Instability was reported more frequently compared with a semirigid ankle brace. A lace-up brace or a semirigid brace seems preferable to the use of an elastic bandage (Kerkhoffs et al., 2002). However, in this review, insufficient data were present to draw definite conclusions from literature. A lace-up brace or a semirigid brace is preferable and recommended.

Based on consensus in the committee in (professional) sports also the use of tape can be considered.

Manual mobilisation after acute ankle injuries. Three systematic reviews were identified, (Brantingham et al., 2009) the most recent review included all trials from the other two reviews (Van der Wees et al., 2006). There are limited positive (very) short-term effects (dorsiflexion, ROM, proprioception) in favour of manual mobilisation of the ankle (6 RCTs, N=224), (Bleakley et al., 2008). However, the clinical relevance of these findings is limited since the effects had disappeared 2 weeks after injury.

Exercise therapy after acute inversion injury. Besides three recent RCTs, (Bleakley et al., 2010) four systematic reviews of sufficient quality were found on this subject. Exercise therapy seems to prevent a recurrence in patients with LAI (2 RCTs, n=130) (RR 0.37; 95% 0.18 to 0.74) on the long term (8 to 12 months). Exercise therapy seems to have no (significant) effect on balance on the medium term (6

to 9 months) (2 RCTs, n=78) (SMD 0.38; 95% -0.15 to 0.91), (Van der et al., 2006).

Exercise therapy should be comprehensive and progressive and include ROM, flexibility (stretching), resistance (strengthening), neuromuscular and proprioceptive, and finally sport-specific functional exercises (Bellows R., Wong CK., 2018).

Range-of-motion (ROM) exercises: Early ROM exercises should be started as soon as pain permits (Kerkhoffs et al., 2003). Such a program can frequently be commenced immediately in grade I and II injuries but may need to be postponed in a grade III injury (Welck et al., 2015). As soon as the pain permits, individuals should begin weight-bearing and ROM rehabilitation (Tiemstra 2012).

Stretching exercises: These exercises should be started with open-chain ankle motions for all planes and non-weight bearing dorsiflexion stretch with upper extremity assist and progress to standing calf stretch and generalized ankle stretching in the closed chain (Reider et al., 2014.).

Strengthening exercises: After restoration of normal ROM, starts this phase, beginning with isometric exercises against an immobile object in both frontal and sagittal planes. Afterward, progresses to isotonic resistive exercises using weights, elastic bands or manual resistance by the therapist for dorsiflexion, plantar flexion, inversion, and eversion as tolerated by pain. It is recommended to start with dorsiflexion and plantar flexion isotonic exercises in the early phases, which do not compromise the ligaments (Prentice, 2015).

Neuromuscular and proprioceptive exercises: The next phase of rehabilitation involves neuromuscular and proprioceptive training to restore the balance and postural control (Hupperets et al., 2009).

In the early phases, neuromuscular (sensorimotor) exercises may be started with intrinsic foot motion (toe extension with ankle plantar flexion/toe flexion with ankle dorsiflexion) and exercises performed on a foam surface, wedge board, Bosu or DynaDisc in the seated position (Wester et al., 1996).

Sport-specific exercises: The last phase of the rehabilitation process involves sport-specific training. In a volleyball player, it may consist of plyometric training with jumping maneuvers and for a soccer player, this would include running and cutting drills (Mattacola et al., 2002). Application of a brace or tape may be warranted during the early period of sport-specific training (Welck et al., 2015).

Aquatic therapy is a new name for a treatment method. Health care practitioners have used various terms for the therapeutic and rehabilitative benefits conferred by water. Early functional rehabilitation of

the sprain ankle should include aquatic range-of-motion exercises and isometric and isotonic strength-training exercises. In the intermediate stage of rehabilitation, a progression of proprioception-training exercises should be incorporated.

Other therapies after acute ankle injuries. In literature, no effect was found of ultrasound, laser therapy (De Bie et al., 1998) and electrotherapy in the treatment of acute ankle injuries (The Hague: Health Council of the Netherlands, 1999). Short-wave therapy also seems ineffective (Pasila et al., 1978).

Some other therapies like homeopathic therapy (Struijs et al., 2015), hyperbaric oxygen therapy (Bennett et al., 2005), or prolotherapy (Rabago et al., 2010) were not effective or there was not sufficient data to support their use in the treatment of acute ankle sprain.

Although a review concluded that acupuncture might have a therapeutic effect to decrease acute symptoms, evidence on the effectiveness of acupuncture is also inconclusive due to large heterogeneity between studies (Kim et al., 2014).

Prevention. Several measures have been studied as possible interventions for lowering the incidence of recurrent ankle sprains. However, the evidence is limited and mostly concentrated on bracing, taping, and neuromuscular training (Farzin Halabchi, Mohammad Hassabi, 2020).

Sport incidence. Farzin Halabchi, Mohammad Hassabi (2020) started that acute sprained ankle is the most common injury of the lower limbs in athletes and accounts for 16%- 40% of all sports-related injuries.

According to Edvardsson Ivarsson, Johnson (2012), who cites (Bauer and Steiner 2009) an estimated 8 million medical treated sport injuries annually in Europe. Refereing to a study by Ekstrand et al. (2011) focused on elite European football, the same authors found that on average players suffered two accidents per season. In the United States, it is estimated that the prevalence of football accidents reported by emergency hospitals is approximately 88,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14. ([anhttps://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=sports-injury-statistics-90-P02787](https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=sports-injury-statistics-90-P02787)).

A study made by Pinyao et al., (2019) found that during 2010–2016, approximately 2.7 million annual ED (emergency department) visits for sports injuries were made by patients aged 5–24 years. The top five most frequent activities that caused ED visits for sports injuries were football (14.1%), basketball (12.5%), pedal cycling (9.9%), soccer (7.1%), and ice or roller skating or skateboarding (6.9%).

An epidemiological study by the authors Yeung, Chan So, Yuan (1994) was conducted on three categories of Chinese athletes in Hong Kong: national

teams, competitive athletes and recreational athletes. This study shows that up to 73% of all athletes had recurrent sprained ankles and 59% of these athletes had significant disabilities and residual symptoms that affected their performance and indicates that an appropriate approach to injury prevention was needed and a comprehensive rehabilitation program.

Conclusion

Identification of injury risk factors, mechanisms, treatment can help to implement tailored injury prevention measures for both sexes at all age and skill levels.

Old injuries, not fully recovered, can cause recurrences, as in the case of sprains on the ankle joint. The severity of the injuries that occur during the practice of various sports is determined not so much by the resulting injuries, but especially by the fact that injured athletes are force to give up competitive activity for a long time.

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