

ATFL Sprain

What is the ATFL?



The ankle joint is made up of the tibia, fibula (bones in the lower leg) and talus (bone below the tibia and fibula). Ligaments in the ankle connect bone to bone and provide stability. The anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL) connects the talus to the fibula and is located on the outside of the ankle. This is the most commonly injured ligament in an ankle sprain.

Causes of ATFL sprain

An ankle sprain typically occurs when the ankle is plantarflexed (toes pointing downward) and inverted (turned inward) forcefully causing an over stretch or tear of the ligaments. When this occurs there is immediate pain, swelling and difficulty walking. Ankle sprains are diagnosed into three categories:

Grade 1 is an ankle sprain in which the ligament is stretched but no tears occur. There is no resulting instability. This is the least severe with the quickest recovery.

Grade 2: Involves moderate pain and swelling and difficulty walking. Mild instability occurs due to partial tears of the lateral ligaments. Immobilization using an aircast or ankle brace may be used.

Grade 3: Most severe: Complete rupture of the lateral ligaments. There is pain initially but that decreases or goes away due to damage of the nerves. This involves immobilization typically with a walking boot or cast due to the instability of the ankle. If conservative treatment is unsuccessful surgery may be indicated to repair the ligaments.

Treatment

Treatment should start with consulting your physician or an orthopedic specialist. Your physician may suggest initially treating an ATFL sprain with RICE (rest, ice, compression, and elevation) and then physical therapy to help improve motion, decrease swelling and improve strength.

If you would like more information about this issue, or need a physician referral in your area, please call us at 310-860-9720.