

Ankle Bracing for Basketball Players

As the winter months approach basketball season heats up. From a sports medicine standpoint, the number of ankle injuries that occur during this time increases significantly. There are ways to decrease you or your child's risk of suffering one of these painful and often nagging injuries.

One of the questions we often hear in the clinic or at schools is, "Should my son or daughter be wearing an ankle brace or tape their ankles for practices and games?" This is a very good question and although each athlete is unique there have been several published research studies examining this topic. The results showed that in athletes with a past history of ankle sprains taping or using an ankle brace decreased the chance of further ankle sprains by approximately 2-5 times.^{1,2} This means that if you or your child has struggled with repetitive ankle sprains it might be beneficial to purchase an ankle brace. On the other hand if you don't have a past history of ankle sprains (less than three), ankle bracing was not as beneficial.^{1,3}



The question that usually follows this answer is "What type of ankle brace should I buy?" The best way to receive the most appropriate care is to have your ankle examined by a sports medicine professional. There are several types of braces available that differ in the amount of protection. What is frequently seen and used is a lace up brace with straps that stirrup around the heel. This is commonly called an ASO ankle brace. This type of brace has been shown to reduce the ankle range of motion that occurs during an ankle sprain, effectively protecting one's ankle. The next step up in terms of protection (and price) is a more rigid brace that is made of a hard plastic. These are termed semi-rigid ankle braces. These braces offer the highest level of protection, yet some athletes feel as though the brace restricts their running and jumping ability. Both types of braces (lace up and semi-rigid) have been shown to not

decrease agility or sprinting times and only minimally decrease vertical jump height (1-2 cm) in athletes.^{4,5}

Stabilizing exercises are also beneficial in reducing the risk of an ankle sprain injury. It has been shown that specific balance and stability exercises using unstable surfaces and correction of the landing technique have shown the greatest effectiveness in decreasing the risk of future ankle sprains.^{6,7} Although bracing and taping are great external aids, the use of the body's muscles provides the most effective bracing available. The best way to prevent ankle problems is to stop them before they even start!

-Brad Seger, PT, CSCS

References

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