

## Treating Chronic Ankle Instability



**C**hronic ankle instability (CAI) is an uncomfortable condition in which the outer (lateral) side of your ankle feels like it might “give way” when you walk, move or even stand. If, in fact, it does “give way” with a turn or sprain, the result is lingering tenderness, discomfort and swelling. Overall, about 10% of people who suffer a sprained ankle will end up with CAI.

**Without treatment, CAI will remain and worsen, because each new sprain increases the likelihood of future sprains.** Additional ankle problems, such as arthritis, can also result from the joint’s destabilization.

A root cause of CAI is the **abnormal lengthening of one or both ligaments** on the ankle’s outer side, usually **caused by an initial ankle sprain that did not heal completely.** Athletes or ballet dancers, who use their ankles strenuously in their work, tend to have stretched ligaments and are more likely to develop CAI after a sprain.

Fortunately, in many cases physical therapy can effectively treat CAI. We can prescribe

- **exercises to strengthen specific ankle muscles to provide some of the stability the ligament once did;**
- **balance and range-of-motion exercises to lessen the feeling that your ankle is about to “give way”;** and
- **taping your ankle or wearing an ankle brace for exterior support to lessen the chance of future sprains occurring and make you feel more secure and comfortable.**

If a comprehensive physical therapy plan cannot counter CAI, surgical options to repair or replace the stretched ligament(s) are usually quite successful. But remember that physical therapy is always part of the postsurgery recuperation.

No matter what treatment you receive for your CAI, we can create a regimen of exercises to make your ankle feel more stable and relieve pain and tenderness. Thus, you will feel more comfortable when you resume your normal daily activities.