

ask an EXPERT

Got a health or fitness question for one of our experts? Email fernwood@mediagiants.com.au, including your name, age and Fernwood club.



"I have had weak ankles ever since I was a child due to repeated sprains. This problem seems to have persisted. What sort of exercises can I do to strengthen my ankles?"

Carla

There are two key things to know and do when you have an ongoing problem with weak ankles. Firstly, train your balance – lots! You can't do too much. This will improve the messages that reach your brain to tell you where your ankles and legs are (called proprioception). This is the biggest key to avoiding another sprain. Secondly, wear a brace or tape your ankles whenever you put yourself in risky situations, like bushwalking or tennis. Research shows it will help to prevent another sprain, and no, it won't make your ankles weaker.

BRAD McINTOSH

"I recently did a 5km fun-run. During the fun-run I noticed some pain on the top outer part of my left foot, but I kept going. After finishing the pain became bad enough that I couldn't put my weight on that part of my foot, and instead had to walk more on the 'inside' of my foot. Now several days later, I can walk alright on the 'inside' of my foot (if I roll my ankle in), but it is still painful to put any pressure on the outside of my foot below my little toe. It's also painful to touch. I am 48 and have had osteoporosis for about six years."

Monique

Osteoporosis causes your bones to become weaker, or more brittle, meaning they can't take as much of a load as stronger bones. With any load bearing exercise osteoporotic bones are at an increased risk for damage. It sounds like your 5th metatarsal (long bone on

the outside of your foot) may have endured an increased load during the fun-run. This could be due to inappropriate footwear, a poor training regime or training surface, or your biomechanics. It would be a good idea to visit your podiatrist or doctor to investigate further. Limiting your weight bearing activity and ensuring you are in a shoe which gives you support and shock absorption (i.e. your runners) will assist until further advice from a health professional.

MELISSA COYLE

"I really want to change the shape of my calves – I have 'chicken' legs, with no calf definition at all! Are there any exercises other than calf raises that you can recommend? Is it true that this is a very difficult muscle to change?"

Jennifer

You're right – the calves can be hard to train for definition and tone, but it is achievable with time and work. The thing to remember is that the calf muscle (gastrocnemius) has two parts – an outer (lateral) and inner (medial) head – which both need to be trained to ensure symmetry. To start when doing any sort of calf raises, turn the toes out to train the medial head and in, to train the lateral head. Try this when standing on your toes and feel which bit of your gastroc muscle 'engages'. The various types of seated and standing single and double legged calf raises are very effective over time, but make sure you use a weight which makes you work and perform at least three sets of 8 to 10 repetitions of each exercise to help increase the size and tone of your calf.

Other great exercises for your calves include one-legged toe raises with weight on a step or plank, or walking on tippy-toes with weight. Do a minimum of three different exercises, i.e. seated calf raises, standing barbell calf raises, and one-legged toe raises for three sets of 8 to 10 (for each exercise) with a 30 to 60 second rest in between. You should do this at least

twice a week to get good results. Dancing, cycling and boxing are also sports that are great for building calf definition. Finally, try going for a walk without wearing heavily padded running shoes that have a wedged heel. This reconnects your feet with the ground and helps make the calf work as the 'spring' it is designed to be when walking or running.

FREDDY WARREN

our EXPERTS



BRAD McINTOSH

Physiotherapist and member of the Australian Physiotherapy Association



MELISSA COYLE

Podiatrist and member of the Australian Podiatry Association



FREDDY WARREN

Personal trainer and Fernwood National Fitness Manager