

Managing ankle sprains

New treatment for ankle sprain in sport

Sprained ankles are one of the most common injuries in sports. Because the inner ankle is more stable than the outer ankle, the foot is likely to turn inward (ankle inversion) from a fall, tackle, or jump. This stretches or tears ligaments; the result is an ankle sprain. The lateral ligament on the outer ankle is most prone to injury.

When an ankle injury occurs it usually affects one or more of the ligaments that help to hold the ankle joint in place. However, if the injury is severe enough damage may also occur to the tendons that attach the muscles to the bones.

There are a number of ligaments that keep the ankle joint in place and prevent a loss of stability. The ligaments that are commonly affected by an ankle sprain are the ones located on the lateral side (or outside) of the ankle.

The problem with ankle injuries, for athletes, is that it means they are unable to return to play as quick as they want or need to. A number of new treatments therefore began emerging to examine this problem.

One treatment, called STABHA (soft tissue adapted biocompatible hyaluronic acid), has been receiving attention as it was recently found that patients with first or second degree ankle sprains using SportVis containing STABHA achieved statistically significant improvement in recovery time and pain relief.

SportVis is delivered through two peri-articular injections; one injection within 48 hours of an ankle sprain and another within the following 48 hours of the ankle sprain.

Hyaluronic acid is typically used to treat joint pain and stiffness in osteoarthritis patients. It is unique because it changes its structure in response to the physical demands of the body. For example, it shifts to an elastic form in the knee joint, while acting more like a lubricant in lower-impact joints.

Dr Philip Carolan is a leading specialist in sports medicine in Dublin, and told Healthy You that he uses SportVis as first-line treatment in sports-related ankle injuries.

“The ankle is a complex joint and yet this treatment is probably the best out there for managing ankle injuries in sport, which is one of the commonest injuries we see.

“The treatment is therefore obviously very beneficial for players. Of course it is not just as simple as getting an injection and then going straight back to activity, it should be stressed that a standard rehab programme after treatment is recommended,” he said.

“But the treatment does result in a quicker healing time. If players want to get back to playing sport quickly, we recommend this. Another benefit is that SportVis reduces the rate of injury recurrence. At the moment it is only recommended for use in ankle injury but I know the potential for its use in other areas is being looked at,” said Dr Carolan, who is also the incoming Dean of Sports and Exercise medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

Further clinical trials are currently being undertaken to show SportVis decreasing the rate of recurrence of ankle sprains. In an 18-month follow-up study presented at EULAR in Paris end of June 2008, 50 per cent of the patients who had been treated with SportVis had no reoccurrence of a sprain versus the placebo group and had 50 per cent less days missing from Sport.

SportVis, if used correctly as prescribed, due to its high biocompatibility, reacts with the torn ligaments of the ankle quickly. It gives the injury site a better quality of repair and helps in the reduction of scar tissue formation. SportVis may prevent further damage to the ligaments and hence may prevent chronic ankle problems for patients later on.

A workshop on SportVis in acute ankle sprain took place recently at the annual meeting of the GAA Doctors and Physiotherapists at the Greenisle Hotel.

For further information on SportVis in ankle sprain, contact your sports doctor or physiotherapist or visit www.sportvis.eu