

The 5-Level Ankle Sprain Balance Progression

Build control from standing still to reacting at speed.

STAND

REACH

CHALLENGE

HOP

REACT

THE RULE Progress by control, not by the calendar. Move up only after 2 controlled sessions with no meaningful increase in pain, swelling, or giving-way later that day or the next morning.

1 Stand

DO Balance on the injured leg near a wall or chair. Use fingertip support if needed.

DOSE 3 x 30 seconds

MOVE UP WHEN

30 seconds hands-free with only small wobbles.

2 Reach

DO Stay on one leg. Tap the other foot forward, sideways, and behind you.

DOSE 2 rounds x 5 taps each direction

MOVE UP WHEN

Your knee and foot stay controlled without stepping down.

3 Add a challenge

DO Balance on a folded towel. Add slow head turns or a light ball toss.

DOSE 3 x 30 seconds

MOVE UP WHEN

You finish each set with no more than one step-off.

4 Hop + stick

DO Small hops forward, sideways, and diagonally. Land on one foot and freeze for 2-3 seconds.

DOSE 2 rounds x 5 hops each direction

MOVE UP WHEN

Landings are quiet, steady, and do not feel unstable.

5 React + return to your activity

Use random-direction hops, partner call-outs, short shuffles, and controlled cuts that match your sport or job.

DOSE 3 x 20-30 seconds

READY TO ADVANCE Full-speed drills feel confident and controlled.

IMPORTANT This is a balance progression, not a complete rehab plan or return-to-sport clearance. Ankle mobility, strength, power, pain, confidence, and full-practice tolerance also matter.

Seek assessment for deformity, numbness, inability to bear weight, marked bony tenderness, repeated giving-way, or symptoms that are worsening/not improving.

Evidence: Martin et al., JOSPT 2021 (doi:10.2519/jospt.2021.0302); Wagemans et al., BMJ Open Sport Exerc Med 2022; Smith et al., BJSM 2021 (PAASS).