

Scan with your smartphone to get an e-version of this leaflet. You might need an app to scan this code.

NHS Grampian

Pulled calf muscle

Information for patients and carers

Accident and Emergency Department
and Physiotherapy Department
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

What is a pulled calf muscle?

You have over-stretched the muscle at the back of your shin. This means you will have torn a few of the little muscle fibres, leading to lots of swelling, bruising and pain.

How can I treat it myself?

For the first 48 hours after your injury the following should help:

Protection	This is provided by the strapping or Tubigrip® we applied to your leg. Take this off after 3 to 5 days when your pain allows. If you were given a heel raise, keep it in place for up to 2 weeks.
Rest	Don't push the movements or your activity levels.
Ice	Wrap a bag of frozen peas or crushed ice in a wet towel. Place over the pulled muscle where it is most painful. Do this for 5 minutes, 2 or 3 times a day. Carry on with this until the pain and swelling go away.
Compression	Your strapping or Tubigrip® will provide this.
Elevation	Keeping your foot raised can help your circulation and reduce any swelling.

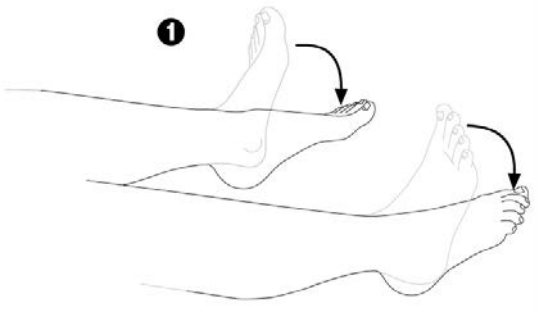
When can I put weight on my foot?

Gradually over the first week you should be able to get all your weight onto your leg and walk normally. Gradually stop using any walking aids such as a stick or crutch.

When can I start exercising?

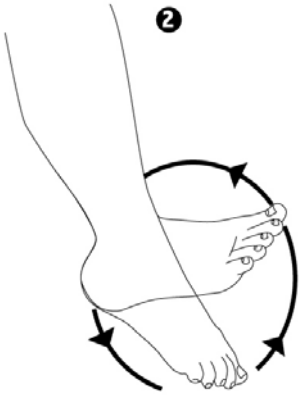
After 48 hours

Here are a few exercises to start after 48 hours. Gradually increase the range of movement over a few days.



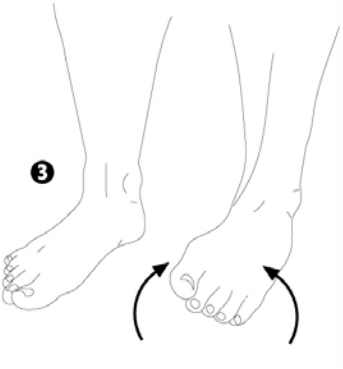
Exercise 1 Ankle flex

Exercise 1:
Lying on your back, or sitting, bend and straighten your ankles. Repeat 10 times.



Exercise 2 Ankle circles

Exercise 2:
When sitting or lying, rotate your ankle. Then change direction. Repeat 10 times.

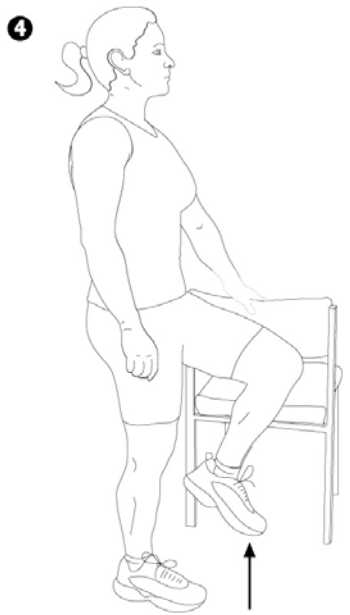


Exercise 3 Inner foot raises

Exercise 3:
When sitting with your foot on the floor, raise the inner border of your foot (big toe) and then the outer border (little toe). Repeat 10 times.

Within a week of your injury

Stretches: you should start stretching exercises within a week of your injury, as your pain allows. Start gently at first.



Exercise 4

Exercise 4:
Stand on one leg (your injured leg). Make sure that you have support available. Try to balance for 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times.

Your balance will be poor at first. It is very important to improve it.



Exercise 5

Exercise 5:
Stand. Push up on your toes. Repeat 10 times.

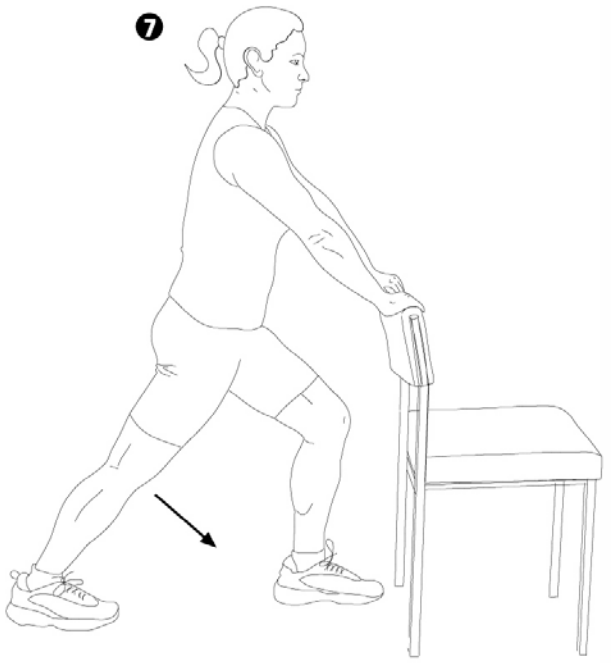


Exercise 6

Exercise 6:
When standing, tighten your buttocks and bend your knees. Your knees should end up over your toes. Don’t go any further. Repeat 10 times.

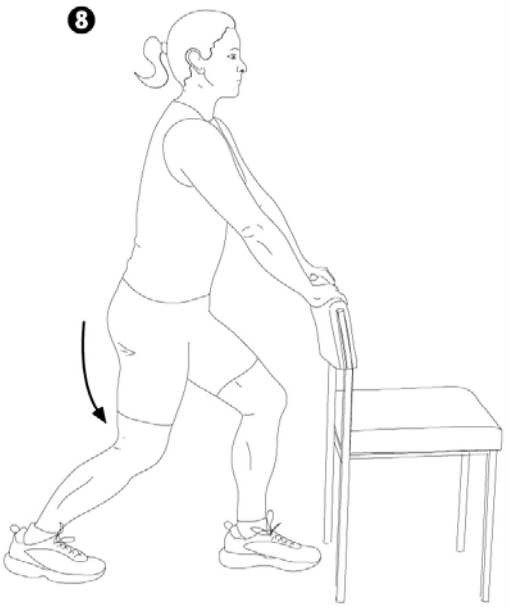
One or two weeks after your injury

Later (about 1 to 2 weeks after your injury and depending on your pain), you can move on to the following exercises. Also, gradually increase your activity levels.



Exercise 7

Exercise 7:
Stand in a walking position with the leg to be stretched straight behind you and your other leg bent in front of you. Support yourself (for example with a chair). Lean your body forwards and down until you feel stretching in the calf of the straight leg. Hold for 30 seconds, then relax. Stretch the other leg. Repeat 3 times.



Exercise 8

Exercise 8:
Stand in a walking position with the leg to be stretched behind you. Hold on to something (for example the back of a chair). Bend the leg to be stretched and let your body weight stretch your calf without lifting your heel off the floor. Hold for 30 seconds then relax. Repeat 3 times.



Exercise 9

Exercise 9:
Stand with the leg to be stretched in front. Ensure your heel is on the floor and your toes pointing to the ceiling. Hold for 30 seconds, then relax. Repeat 3 times.

Balance is often a problem after this kind of injury. You will probably need to work on your balance until it is as good as the other side. This can also help to prevent further injuries.

When can I get back to my normal exercise?

Take things fairly easy at first. Try walking, swimming and cycling, which are all low impact. Start with small amounts of exercise and gradually increase, as pain allows, to activities you did previously, such as running and football.

Remember, push UP to pain, but not INTO it

The pain and swelling should gradually settle. If the problem worsens and this advice is not helping, or if your calf becomes more red, hot and swollen, seek advice from your GP or the Accident & Emergency Department.

Contact number

Accident & Emergency Department
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

☎ 01224 553306 ☎

This leaflet is also available in large print.

Other formats and languages can be supplied on request. Please call Quality Development on 01224 554149 for a copy. Ask for leaflet 0106.

Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet. If you have any comments on how we can improve it, please call 01224 554149 to let us know.

A&E and Physiotherapy Departments
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary
Leaflet supplied by:

revised November 2018
©NHS Grampian
Quality Development, Foresterhill