

**FOOT INTRINSIC EXERCISES**

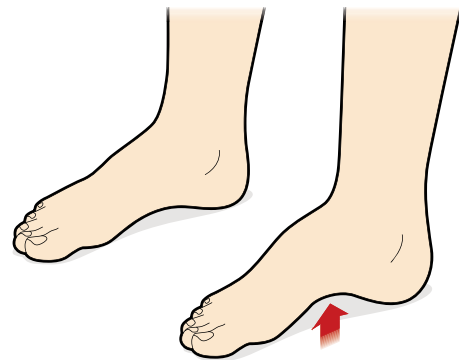
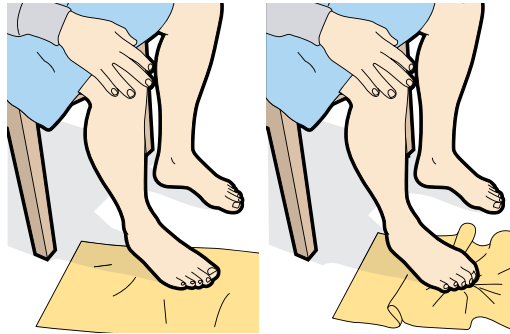
As well as a graduated stretching programme for the plantar fascia, foot intrinsic exercises are vital. These help to improve the strength, coordination, control and balance around the foot and ankle. Below are four to try. It's also worth adding in the usual calf strengthening exercises for the gastroc (straight leg calf raise) and

soleus (bent leg calf raise) muscles. It's important to stretch and strengthen the structure, but the most important thing to manage plantar fasciitis is early:

- Diagnosis
- Offloading
- Intervention

**TOWEL SCRUNCHES**

**METHOD** Sit, keeping the heel in contact with the floor and the arch held in a good position. Use the toes to curl and scrunch up the towel, gathering it towards you. Repeat for 1-2mins. Once you've mastered this, do it from a standing position.



**ARCH LIFTS**

**METHOD** Sit, keeping the heel, big toe and ball of the foot rested and in contact with the floor. Draw up the arch of the foot. Build to 5 x 25secs. Progress the exercise into a standing position. Try not to claw with the big toe.

**PICK UPS**

**METHOD** Pop something small onto the floor (marbles, coins, a scrunched-up tissue), then use your toes to pick up and move the item(s). This works the flexor tendons under the foot. Repeat for 2-3mins.



**TIPTOE WALKS**

**METHOD** This will improve balance, calf strength and ankle stability. Try to walk on your tiptoes, without letting the heels drop. Keep the heels in parallel. Repeat for 2-3mins. Progress by walking at increased speed or changing direction. To challenge your balance, repeat the exercise with your eyes closed.

**READER SOS**

After the Great North Run, I thought I'd just plough straight back into my training, but I've done something to my ankle. It started with pain and swelling. I could walk, but I couldn't stand on my toes and certainly couldn't run. Stairs were difficult too. It doesn't hurt as much now, but I'm worried that it's not simply the sprained ankle my GP told me it was and I'm scared to start running on it again.

**ANTHONY TOWERS, VIA EMAIL**

With an ankle sprain, there is normally an incident you can recall where you go over on the ankle. This is not always initially painful. If treated incorrectly, a simple sprained ankle can continue to affect training for months. Secondary complications, if not initially treated, can include pain and recurring swelling, a reduced range of movement in the joint, impaired function and balance, as well as chronic instability.

The key to treatment is the usual PRICE (protection, rest, ice, compression and elevation) for the first 72 hours, with a focus on reducing the swelling. Rehabilitation is the next step, with single leg strengthening and restoration of the balance reflex around the ankle. A graded return to training can then commence.

A physiotherapist will be able to quickly assess the ankle to see if a sprain is the cause of your symptoms. They'll also be able to rule out a number of other complications that could be causing your ankle symptoms, such as irritation of the Achilles, a synovitis (swelling) in the ankle joint itself and a problem with the boney structure of the foot.

Speak to other runners to find a physiotherapist they recommend. Many therapists have links with running clubs, so you'll be getting the right advice for a sports injury. The other important thing is to listen to your body. If you're scared to run on it, don't! Once walking, stairs, etc. are pain-free, you can always increase training without running. Cycling, swimming, cross-training and aqua jogging are all good ways to maintain your cardiovascular fitness and strengthen the ankle without putting it at risk of further injury.

**?** **DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR EMMA?**  
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