Chronic Ankle Pain

When ankle pain continues for 6 weeks or more, it is considered chronic. The most appropriate first imaging test is an x-ray (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/bonerad) . X-rays provide general information about bone and tissue abnormalities. It is almost always the only imaging test of the ankle needed.

In people who have ankle arthritis (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/arthritis) and have pain that requires treatment, it may be appropriate to figure out which of the joints in the ankle is causing the pain. Either CT (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/bodyct) or MRI (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/muscmr) without contrast is appropriate to locate the joint causing the pain. Using imaging to guide a needle to inject anesthetic in the area of the pain to help confirm the cause is usually appropriate, too.

Some chronic ankle conditions cannot be seen on x-ray. When these conditions are suspected, MRI without intravenous contrast is appropriate. CT or MR arthrography (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/arthrog) may also be appropriate, in which case an x-ray dye is injected before the test is performed. These conditions include:

- Osteochondral lesion: an injury affecting the talus bone (a supporting bone in the ankle) and the surrounding cartilage. CT or MRI may be appropriate.
- Tendon abnormality: inflammation of the tendon, commonly known as tendonitis. Ultrasound (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/musculous) or MRI may be appropriate.
- Ankle instability: residual wear and tear on the ligaments makes the ankle unstable. Ultrasound or MRI may be appropriate.
- Ankle impingement syndrome: overuse and microtears of the tendon causing pain and limiting ankle range of motion. MRI, CT or ultrasound may be appropriate.
- No obvious suspected disorder: MRI, CT, ultrasound, or image-guided local anesthetic injections may be appropriate.

— By Frank J. Rybicki Jr. and MacArinze Ojiaku, MD. This information originally appeared in the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

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