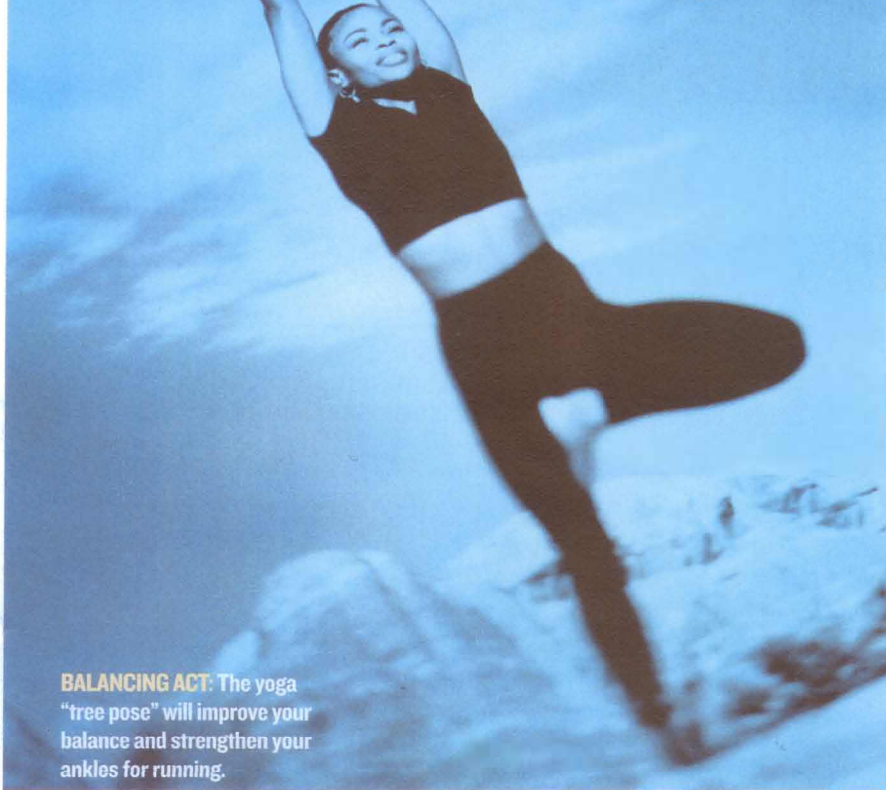


ASK THE EXPERTS

Steady on Your Feet

Advice on avoiding ankle twists, running with your dog, and more



BALANCING ACT: The yoga "tree pose" will improve your balance and strengthen your ankles for running.

I keep twisting my ankle—just stepping wrong on a small stone will do it. Would an ankle brace help? Any other suggestions?

E.G., Boise, Idaho

Yes, an ankle brace could help. Your weak ankle could be a previous injury haunting you, such as scar tissue or a fleck of loose cartilage moving around in the ankle joint causing trouble. If your ankle frequently rolls over, it's likely that the supporting ligaments have been stretched out or torn. You could even be double-jointed: Some people (especially women) have too much rubber-band-like elastin in their ligaments, which make them give out easily when running on uneven surfaces.

Whatever the cause, the best way to prevent ankle twists is to strengthen the muscles around the joint. Here's how:

- **Calf raises:** Stand with the balls of your feet on a step or thick book, lower your heels down, and slowly rise up. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

- **Heel walk:** Lift your toes off the ground, and walk 10 to 15 steps on your heels.

- **Toe scrunch:** Place a towel on the floor in front of a chair. Sit down, and put one foot's toes on the towel. Use your toes to scrunch up the cloth, while keeping your heel on the floor. Repeat 10 to 15 times on each foot.

- **Balance:** Try the yoga "tree pose" (pictured above). Standing barefoot, balance on your right leg. Place the bottom of your left foot against the inside of your calf (easier) or thigh (more difficult). Place your palms together in front of your chest. Feeling steady? Pressing your hands together, raise them above your head. Switch legs. Work up to holding for 45 seconds, then try it with your eyes closed. This will help you develop better stability and a stronger base of support.

As for an ankle brace, it would strengthen

en your ankle, but if you're prone to ankle sprains and/or run on rocky or uneven surfaces, it will provide support. You can buy lace-up and Velcro-style supports online (see drrun.com), or try them on at a surgical supply store, so you can ensure a good fit.

If you follow this advice and still experience ankle stiffness and pain (especially first thing in the morning), you should see a sports podiatrist for an examination with an arthroscope, which can look inside your ankle.

—Richard T. Braver, M.D., sports podiatrist and ankle specialist in Englewood, N.J., member of *RW's* science advisory board

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