



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIP ABDUCTOR MUSCLE STRENGTH AND CHRONIC ANKLE SPRAIN IN ADULTS

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Abstract

Background: Chronic ankle sprains, affecting approximately 2 million individuals annually, often progress to chronic ankle instability (CAI) in up to 70% of cases, with an estimated healthcare cost of

~\$1,200 per injury [1]. Hip abductor weakness, particularly of the gluteus medius, has been implicated in ankle dysfunction via the kinetic chain; however, its impact in non-athletic adults remains underexplored [2,14].

Objective: To compare hip abductor strength, single-leg balance, and functional ankle stability in non-athletic adults with CAI versus healthy controls, and to identify potential rehabilitation implications.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted at IAMR, Ghaziabad, from September 2024 to August 2025. Thirty non-athletic adults aged 18–27 years were recruited using purposive sampling (15 CAI cases, 15 matched healthy controls). Hip abductor strength was measured using handheld dynamometry (Nm/kg), balance was assessed using timed single-leg stance (eyes open and closed), and ankle stability was evaluated with the Cumberland Ankle Instability Tool (CAIT) [4]. Data were analyzed using independent t-tests, Pearson's correlations, and Cohen's d effect sizes.

Results: Participants with CAI demonstrated 36% lower hip abductor strength compared to controls (225.1N vs. 306.8N, $p<0.001$, $d=1.66$). Eyes-open balance was significantly reduced in the CAI group (36.6s vs. 51.4s, $p=0.002$), and a moderate positive correlation was observed between hip abductor strength and eyes-open balance ($r=0.54$, $p=0.002$). No significant relationship was found for eyes-closed balance ($p=0.600$). Gender and limb dominance showed no significant effects ($p>0.05$).

Conclusion: The findings support the role of the kinetic chain in CAI, with hip abductor weakness contributing to impaired balance. Rehabilitation programs for CAI should emphasize hip strengthening alongside balance training. Further longitudinal studies are warranted to establish causality [1,14,17].

Keywords: Chronic ankle instability, hip abductor strength, gluteus medius, balance, rehabilitation.

Introduction

Ankle sprains are a prevalent musculoskeletal issue, with an estimated 2 million cases annually, accounting for 12% of emergency department visits and costing ~\$1,200 per incident [1]. Up to 70% of these cases progress to chronic ankle instability (CAI), characterized by recurrent sprains, persistent pain, and functional deficits [3]. The kinetic chain model posits that proximal hip abductor

muscles, such as the gluteus medius and minimus, influence ankle stability by controlling pelvic alignment and femoral motion, with weakness increasing injury risk by 3.2-fold due to compensatory patterns like knee valgus and ankle inversion [2,16]. In non-athletic adults, sedentary lifestyles and occupational demands, such as prolonged standing, exacerbate hip abductor weakness, elevating CAI risk by 2.1 times when strength falls below 1.5 Nm/kg [17,18]. Current rehabilitation protocols, with only 12% incorporating hip-focused exercises, fail to address these proximal deficits, contributing to reinjury rates of 34–72% over three years [14,19]. This study aims to explore the association between hip abductor strength and CAI in non-athletic adults, quantifying strength differences, examining biomechanical and neuromuscular interactions, and proposing integrated rehabilitation strategies. The objectives include assessing the link between hip strength and CAI prevalence, investigating functional task interactions, and identifying hip-strengthening interventions to reduce recurrence. The hypotheses suggest that reduced hip strength correlates with increased CAI, targeted strengthening improves stability, and non-athletic adults with weaker hip abductors exhibit greater deficits [1,20].

Methodology

To examine the relationship between hip abductor strength and chronic ankle sprains, a cross-sectional study was conducted at Ramsha Clinic, Okhla, New Delhi, from September 2024 to August 2025, involving 30 non-athletic adults (15 CAI cases with ≥ 2 sprains in the past 12 months and CAIT score < 24 , 15 controls with no sprain history and CAIT score ≥ 28) aged 18–27 years [4,15]. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling, matched 1:1 for age, gender, and activity level, with exclusion criteria including recent injuries, neurological conditions, pregnancy, and competitive athletic status to minimize confounders [5]. Hip abductor strength was assessed using a handheld dynamometer (Lafayette, ICC=0.92), balance via single-leg stance timed with a stopwatch (eyes open/closed, up to 30 seconds), and functional stability via the CAIT (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.83$) [4,18]. Physical activity was measured with the IPAQ ($\rho=0.80$), and BMI was calculated using a stadiometer and digital scale [19]. Data collection included 30-minute sessions with demographic questionnaires, three maximal isometric strength trials per leg, balance tests, and movement fault observations (e.g., hip drop) [21]. Statistical analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) included t-tests, Pearson's correlations, and Cohen's d effect sizes, with normality confirmed via Shapiro-Wilk tests ($p>0.05$) [6]. The sample size of 30 was calculated using G*Power for 80% power and a medium effect size ($d=0.5$) [7,22].

Data Analysis

Data from 30 participants (15 CAI cases, 15 controls) were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) to evaluate differences in hip abductor strength, balance, and functional stability [6]. After confirming no missing values or outliers, Shapiro-Wilk tests verified normality ($p>0.05$), supporting parametric analyses [7]. Descriptive statistics summarized participant characteristics, hip strength (N), balance times (seconds), and BMI (kg/m^2) [23]. Independent t-tests compared hip strength and balance between groups, with Levene's test confirming equal variances ($p=0.957$) [6,19]. Pearson's correlations assessed relationships between hip strength and balance outcomes, and Cohen's d quantified effect sizes [7]. ANOVA evaluated gender and limb dominance effects [24]. Results showed a 36% reduction in hip abductor strength in CAI cases (225.1 ± 47.9 N vs. 306.8 ± 50.8 N, $p<0.001$, $d=1.66$), a large effect [16]. Eyes-open balance was significantly lower in cases (36.6 ± 7.2 s vs. 51.4 ± 5.1 s, $p=0.002$), with a moderate correlation to hip strength ($r=0.54$, $p=0.002$, $R^2=0.29$) [25]. Eyes-closed balance showed no significant difference (19.3 ± 6.4 s vs. 22.3 ± 5.9 s, $p=0.600$) or correlation ($r=0.10$) [18]. Gender ($p=0.451$) and limb dominance ($p=0.423$) had no effects [24]. These findings highlight hip abductor weakness's role in CAI and dynamic balance [2,20].

Results

The study of 30 non-athletic adults (15 CAI cases, 15 controls, aged 18–27 years) confirmed significant differences in hip abductor strength and balance performance [1]. Groups were matched: cases (age 22.5 ± 4.5 years, BMI 23.5 ± 3.1 kg/m^2 , 8M/7F) and controls (age 22.5 ± 4.5 years, BMI 23.3 ± 2.9 kg/m^2 , 8M/7F), with no significant differences ($p>0.05$) [15]. Hip abductor strength,

measured via dynamometry, was 36% lower in CAI cases (225.1 ± 47.9 N, 95% CI [198.2, 252.0]) compared to controls (306.8 ± 50.8 N, 95% CI [279.1, 334.5], $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.66$), indicating a large effect [16,22]. Single-leg balance with eyes open was reduced in cases (36.6 ± 7.2 s vs. 51.4 ± 5.1 s, $p = 0.002$), with a moderate correlation to hip strength ($r = 0.54$, $p = 0.002$, $R^2 = 0.29$) [9,25]. Eyes-closed balance showed no group difference (19.3 ± 6.4 s vs. 22.3 ± 5.9 s, $p = 0.600$) or correlation ($r = 0.10$) [18]. Subgroup analyses found no effects of gender (male: 278.5 ± 58.3 N, female: 251.2 ± 67.1 N, $p = 0.451$) or limb dominance (left: 260.1 ± 61.8 N, right: 270.9 ± 66.2 N, $p = 0.423$) [24]. These results confirm hip abductor weakness as a key CAI factor, suggesting a strength threshold (~ 250 N) for risk assessment [2,23].

Discussion

The study revealed a 36% reduction in hip abductor strength (225.1 N vs. 306.8 N, $p < 0.001$) and impaired eyes-open balance (36.6 s vs. 51.4 s, $p = 0.002$) in CAI cases, consistent with reports of 17–22% strength deficits in similar populations [8,16]. These findings support the kinetic chain theory, where weak hip abductors increase ankle inversion moments by 15–20%, elevating sprain risk [2]. The moderate correlation between hip strength and eyes-open balance ($r = 0.54$, $p = 0.002$) aligns with prior studies ($r = 0.65$), indicating proximal deficits impair dynamic stability [9,25]. The lack of correlation with eyes-closed balance ($p = 0.600$) suggests proprioceptive deficits may require dynamic assessments [18,26]. Mechanistically, delayed gluteus medius activation (48.5 – 52.3 ms in CAI vs. 39.2 – 42.1 ms in controls) and reduced neuromuscular excitability contribute to instability [10,19]. The study's strengths include matched groups and validated tools, but its cross-sectional design limits causality inference, and the small sample ($n = 30$) restricts generalizability [15]. Clinically, hip-focused exercises (e.g., seated abductions, improving balance by 28%) are critical for non-athletic adults with a 2.1-fold higher CAI risk [17,27]. Workplace interventions, such as balance training, could reduce sprain risk by 25% [12]. Future longitudinal studies and standardized hip strength protocols are recommended [14,20].

Conclusion

This cross-sectional study of 30 non-athletic adults (15 CAI cases, 15 controls) at Ramsha Clinic, New Delhi, confirmed a 36% reduction in hip abductor strength in CAI cases (225.1 ± 47.9 N vs. 306.8 ± 50.8 N, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.66$) and impaired eyes-open balance (36.6 ± 7.2 s vs. 51.4 ± 5.1 s, $p = 0.002$), with a moderate correlation ($r = 0.54$, $p = 0.002$) [16,22]. CAIT scores (< 24 in cases) indicated persistent instability [4]. Controlled for age, gender, BMI, and activity level, the findings support the kinetic chain theory, where hip abductor weakness disrupts pelvic stability, increasing ankle joint loading [2,17]. Current rehabilitation protocols, with only 12% including hip exercises, are inadequate [14]. The study recommends integrating hip-strengthening exercises (e.g., leg lifts, improving balance by 28%) and dynamometry screening, as 54% of clinicians overlook hip assessments [19,27]. Workplace interventions, like balance exercises during breaks, could reduce sprain risk by 25% in standing-intensive occupations [12]. Future research should include longitudinal studies to establish causality, standardized hip strength protocols, and investigations in diverse populations, such as older adults with sarcopenia, to reduce CAI recurrence by 20–30% [13,28].

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