

WHAT IS A SPRAIN?

A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament. Ligaments connect one bone to another bone at a joint and help keep the bones from moving out of place. They can be divided into categories based on severity, from 1st degree (minor) to 3rd degree (severe).

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain or Tenderness
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Stiffness
- Inability to walk or bear weight on the joint

RICE APPROACH

Rest--Limit use of the body part, in this case the foot and ankle. Use crutches for as long as it hurts you to stand on your foot or as directed by your physician.

Ice--Ice decreases the swelling, pain, bruising and muscle spasms. Apply ice 20 minutes at a time, approximately four times daily. Be careful not to apply the ice directly to the skin. Keep using ice for up to 3 days after the injury or as directed.

Compression--Wrapping your foot or ankle may be the best way to avoid swelling and bruising. You'll probably need to keep it wrapped for 1 or 2 days after the injury and perhaps for up to a week or more. If using a traditional Ace Wrap, begin at the toes and wrap upward toward the ankle. More severe sprains may be treated similarly to a fracture, requiring splinting and at times even casting.

Elevation--Raising your foot to or above the level of your heart will help prevent the swelling from getting worse and will help reduce bruising. Try to keep your foot elevated for about 2 to 3 hours a day if possible.

WILL I NEED TO WEAR A BRACE?

A brace or splint helps keep the bones and injured ligaments from moving, which reduces pain and speeds healing. Based on the severity of your injury your doctor will determine if a brace or splint is necessary.

- Use an Ace Wrap for _____ days.
- Use a Brace for _____ days.

BEARING WEIGHT

For minor sprains and strains you may be able to bear weight again as soon as you are comfortable. For moderate to severe injuries, the use of crutches may be necessary, to take some or all of the weight off of your foot and ankle, for a period of time. Based on the seriousness of your sprain your doctor will decide when and to what extent you can bear weight.

- Your foot/ankle may bear weight again as soon as you are comfortable.
- Start by using crutches and touching only your toes to the ground for _____ days. Then slowly increase weight as you feel comfortable.
- Use crutches and do not put any weight on your foot or ankle for _____ days. Then progress to the "toe-touch" method above.
- Use crutches and do not put any weight on your foot or ankle. Follow up with an orthopedist.

MEDICATION

Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as Ibuprofen or naproxen can help relieve pain and inflammation. If the pain is severe your doctor may recommend prescription medications.

HOW CAN I PREVENT REINJURY?

When your doctor feels you're ready to exercise again, you can help prevent further sprains and setbacks by wearing a semi-rigid ankle brace when you exercise for another 1 to 2 months. Special wraps that use hook and loop fasteners, or air-filled or laced braces may help prevent re-injury. Wearing properly fitted shoes with adequate support may help prevent sprains. You may also tape your ankle with a wide, non-elastic adhesive tape. Elastic tape or braces are usually not helpful because the elastic gives too much around the joint. Once your sprain has completely healed, a program of foot and ankle exercises will also help prevent re-injury by making the muscles stronger, which provides protection to the ligaments. Ask your doctor to recommend an exercise program.