



What is it?

A sprain is an injury to a ligament, in the ankle the ligament on the outside of the foot is most commonly involved.

Symptoms

There may be an audible snap, crack or tear associated with the injury. Pain is experienced on the outside and front of the ankle. Depending on the severity of the injury, the ankle may swell and you may have difficulty walking due to pain. The ankle may also feel weak. Bruising may develop which can extend up the leg and down to the toes.

What causes it?

Ligaments are injured when they are overstretched (sprained). This commonly occurs when the foot and ankle are forcibly turned inwards, this injury is often referred to as a 'rolled ankle'. The ankle may be rolled during rapid changes in direction, on uneven surfaces, a simple "trip" whilst walking or treading on a ball or opponents foot.

What should you do?

The aims of treatment are to keep inflammation, swelling, and pain to a minimum, and to be able to use the joint normally again as quickly as possible, this will depend on the severity of the injury. To limit the severity of the injury, stop the activity immediately and start initial treatment. Treatment of a sprain for the first 72 hours, think of PRICED

- **Protect** the joint by stopping the aggravating activity and reducing pressure through the joint. Strapping, bracing or crutches may be required depending on the severity of the injury.
- **Rest** the affected joint for 48-72 hours after injury, this does not have to be complete rest.
- **Ice** should be applied as soon as possible after injury for 15-20 minutes, and then repeated every 1-2 hours. Make an ice pack by wrapping ice cubes in a plastic bag or towel. (Do not put ice directly next to skin as it may 'ice-burn')
- **Compression** involves the application of a firm elastic bandage around your ankle. It should be firm but not too tight that it stops blood flow or causes pain
- **Elevation** involves lying with your ankle resting comfortably on a chair or pillows, so that its position is above the level of your heart
- **Diagnosis** of your injury can improve the rate of recovery by providing you with specific advice on the management of your symptoms

Treatment of a sprain 72 hours after injury and beyond

- **Movement** should replace rest. For most sprains this will simply mean starting to use the injured joint more freely. Don't do anything that causes too much pain, but gently get the joint gradually moving again to prevent it becoming stiff and weak and to restore your balance
- **Compression** bandages. You may be advised to remove the bandage after 48 -72 hours because the bandage may limit movement of the joint which should normally be moving more freely after this time
- **Sometimes** an exercise program under the supervision of a physiotherapist is helpful to restore normal movement balance and strength. Your physiotherapist also has a number of ways in which they can help with your pain and improve joint mobility

Can you prevent it?

Always warm up before doing vigorous exercise. Use good supporting footwear for sport. Do not do occasional bouts of vigorous exercise. Instead, aim for a general and steady build-up to fitness. It is important to regain strength, flexibility and balance of your ankle to prevent recurrence, your physiotherapist can you provide specific exercises to do this.

Contact us now

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