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Ankle sprain

An ankle sprain is a common injury and involves injury to the ligaments that support the ankle joint. Most ankle sprains will heal within a few weeks but it is important to follow a few simple rules to aid this process and help prevent further injury.

The ankle joint is supported by ligaments which help to keep the joint stable. These ankle ligaments can be injured to varying degrees when you sprain your ankle.

Causes

Common causes of ankle injuries involve:

- Sporting activities that involve running, jumping and changes of direction
- Routine activities when the foot slips or turns in an abnormal way. This can include: walking on uneven surfaces, unsupportive or ill-fitting footwear, or slipping off the edge of a kerb or step.

Treatment

During the first **48 -72 hours**
It is advisable to take the following steps to aid your recovery - **PRICE**:

- **P**rotect the ankle – Good, supportive footwear is essential. In severe cases below knee casts, orthopaedic boots or splints can lead to a faster recovery.
- **R**est – relative rest will allow a natural healing process to occur
- **I**ce – Ice can be used for a maximum of 20 minutes at a time every few hours to help reduce the inflammation and control the pain. Be sure to place a thin towel between the ice and skin to prevent ice burn. If you use a bag of frozen food, do not eat it after refreezing.
- **C**ompression – Bandage or tubi-grip can help to reduce the swelling. It should be snug but not too tight. Wear it first thing in the morning to prevent swelling building up during the day. Remove it at night or while resting with the foot elevated.
- **E**levation – raising the ankle above the knee and the knee above the hip will help to reduce swelling.

Painkillers such as codeine and paracetamol can provide pain relief – do not exceed the stated dosage guidelines on the packet.

- You can start by taking paracetamol upto 1g 6 hourly, you can speak to your pharmacist about adding some codeine or NSAID (non-steroidal anti inflammatory drug). **Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking them to make sure they are suitable for you**.

Avoid:

- **Heat** as it can increase the blood flow and inflammation during the first 72 hours
- **Alcohol** as it can also increase the blood flow and swelling and also reduce healing
- **Running** or **impact exercise** as it can make the injury worse
- **Massage** (during the first 72 hours) as it can increase bleeding and swelling. After 72 hours it can be soothing and help improve function.

When should I seek further advice?

If you have any of the following please seek further advice from a medical professional:

- Pain over the bony areas
- Pain and swelling is very severe and does not improve within the first week
- Pain and swelling does not allow you to walk or weight-bear

Diagnosis of an ankle sprain is made based on clinical presentation and examination. Your health care professional may order an x-ray to exclude any bone injury.

Treatment post injury

It is important to work on improving range of movement, strength and sensory abilities soon after injury. Research suggests that appropriate exercises immediately after the injury can lead to a faster and better recovery.

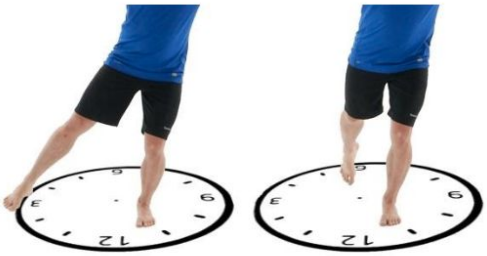
Exercises

Initial exercises (within first 2 weeks)






Progression exercises (weeks 2-4)



Return to sport

If you are aiming to return to sporting activities, you must build up progressively and be able to complete all of the above exercises prior to starting impact exercise and sport. Train so that you can complete all of the different elements of your sport/activity with confidence before you participate in the activity fully. If you play a contact sport, you may require a higher level of rehabilitation than the scope of this information leaflet.

It can take 8 – 12 weeks to recover from an ankle sprain, and even longer with severe sprains or high ankle sprains.