

# MANAGING YOUR ANKLE SPRAIN



Ankle sprains are common, especially in sports such as basketball and soccer.

Various types of sprains:



**Inversion sprain**  
(calcaneo-fibular and anterior talo-fibular ligaments)



**High ankle sprain**  
(anterior tibio-fibular ligament)

**Abduction sprain** (deltoid ligament)



The health care provider also uses x-rays to diagnose a severe injury.

## What Are Ankle Sprains?

Ankle sprains are injuries resulting from stretching, or partly or completely tearing one or more ligaments holding the ankle joint together. Ligaments are bands of strong, flexible fibers connecting bones. Tendons connect muscles and bones. Ankle sprains are common, especially in sports such as basketball and soccer.

## What Causes Ankle Sprains?

Sprains occur when the joint is forced to bend more than normal, thus hurting ligaments. The most common type occurs when the foot turns in (called inversion), and full body weight comes down on the ankle. The foot can also turn too far out (called eversion).

## What Are the Symptoms of Ankle Sprains?

Popping or tearing is felt at the time of injury. Pain occurs during the injury and after, when walking or moving the ankle. The ankle may swell and feel stiff. The skin around the ankle may be bruised.

With severe injuries, extreme pain makes weight bearing and moving the ankle hard. Tingling or numbness in the foot may mean nerve or blood vessel damage.

## How Are Ankle Sprains Diagnosed?

The health care provider will ask about the accident and examine the ankle by moving it to check ligaments and tendons.

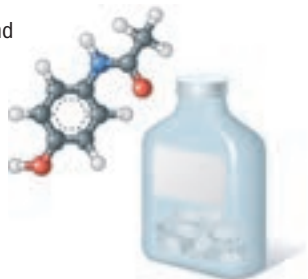
For a minor sprain, no more tests are needed. For a severe sprain, the health care provider may order x-rays. Additional tests such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be done if pain persists and x-rays are inconclusive.

## MANAGING YOUR ANKLE SPRAIN

At first, treatment includes applying ice to the injury right away, using a compression wrap or air splint on the injured area, and elevating the ankle above the level of the hip. Then, while resting your ankle, stretch it gently to keep it from becoming stiff.



Your health care provider may recommend exercises or physical therapy to help you heal, strengthen muscles, and try to prevent future injuries. Over-the-counter pain pills may help.



Once you have less pain, you can increase your walking.

Avoid all activities that will increase swelling, because it will slow your return to complete activity.



### FROM THE DESK OF

#### NOTES

### How Are Ankle Sprains Treated?

Ice is applied immediately, because swelling starts quickly. The ankle is rested, which may mean using crutches. Walking is kept to a minimum. A compression wrap or splint is put on the ankle. The ankle is elevated above hip level. Remember these by thinking “RICE” (*Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation*). A compression wrap, splint, or brace lets the ankle move without injury. Never use heat before 72 hours after the injury (causes more swelling).

Physical therapy can strengthen muscles, help recovery, and help prevent more injuries.

Over-the-counter antiinflammatory medications (ibuprofen) can be taken to decrease swelling and provide pain relief.

Severe sprains may need surgery and physical therapy.

### DOs and DON'Ts in Managing an Ankle Sprain:

- ✓ **DO** warm up and stretch before exercising.
- ✓ **DO** wear ankle braces when playing sports if you often get sprains.
- ✓ **DO** lose weight, if overweight.
- ✓ **DO** keep fit.
- ✓ **DO** take medicines and use crutches prescribed by your health care provider.
- ✓ **DO** follow RICE and physical therapy instructions.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you can't walk on your injured ankle, swelling hasn't left after 2 days or increases, the ankle becomes redder or hot, you have a fever, or you notice popping, catching, or the ankle giving way.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your foot is numb, tingling, or is a blue or dusky color or if your toes are cold (signs of cut-off circulation).
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you don't see improvement in 7 to 10 days after the sprain.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have pain or swelling in the leg (may mean a blood clot).
- ⊗ **DON'T** do activities that will increase swelling. Avoid early use of heat or too much activity, standing, or sitting with the ankle hanging.
- ⊗ **DON'T** play sports again until pain and swelling are gone and the ankle is strong.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

- The American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine  
Tel: (847) 292-4900  
Fax: (847) 292-4905  
Website: <http://www.sportsmed.org>
- American College of Sports Medicine  
Tel: (317) 637-9200  
Website: <http://www.acsm.org>