

Ankle Sprain Facts

An ankle sprain is one of the most common sports injuries and happens quite frequently in normal daily activities. Although painful, it usually does not cause any long-term problems, if treated properly. However, if untreated, even the simple, minor ankle sprain can produce longer lasting problems such as decreased strength, balance and flexibility and increase your risk of future injuries to the same side (like your knee). Following are a few guidelines to help you care for your sprained ankle, and decrease your risk of future injuries. This is why taking care of your sprained ankle the right way is important.

An ankle sprain means that one or more of the ligaments around your ankle have been stretched, or even torn. This happens when you land on someone's foot, or land awkwardly, rolling your ankle. This usually occurs with the foot rolling inward, stretching the lateral (or outer) ankle ligaments.

When to see a doctor

If you just sprained your ankle, you don't usually need to see a doctor, but a few simple tests can tell you if you should.

You should see a doctor:

- If you are unable to stand and put weight on it.
- If you have intense pain above the ankle in your lower leg.
- If the pain and swelling continue for more than a few days, despite treatment (see below).

What you can do for yourself

For the first 24-48 hours, your ankle will probably swell and might even show some bruising. Minimize this by using the **R.I.C.E.** formula:

- **Rest:** This means not pushing the ankle to do too much, although some movement will help to get the swelling down. Try toe wiggling or gently moving the ankle up and down 10-15 times each hour. If you can stand on it without too much pain, then to ahead and walk as normally as possible. If no, you can use some crutches fo a day or two. If even standing on it is very painful, you should see a doctor.
- **Ice:** Ice the ankle frequently to decrease pain and swelling.
- **Compression:**Using a compressive bandage (like an Ace© bandage) can help support the ankle and reduce swelling. It should be wrapped from the middle of the foot to just above the ankle. Do not wrap too tightly!
- **Elevation:**Keeping the ankle above your heart level will also help keep swelling down.

During the next 2 weeks, your ankle is busy healing. As long as it is tolerable, it is OK to stand and walk on it. As long as you don't twist it again, movement will actually help it heal. In the beginning, movements will seem stiff & may be sore. Use ice to help with the pain and control the swelling. If it does not seem to be getting better within the first week, an evaluation by your doctor may be needed.

When you are inactive for longer periods of time (i.e. sitting at work), make sure to keep moving your foot / ankle periodically to keep it from getting stiff. Simple up and down movements of the foot can help, or you can try drawing letters of the alphabet in the air with your foot.

Ways to increase your activity

When the pain and swelling have subsided and you are walking without favoring your ankle, you can begin some balance exercise:

Try standing in a doorway on 1 leg for 10 seconds. If you can't keep your balance for more than a couple seconds then try standing with 1 foot in front the other (as if you were walking a tightrope!), then try the one leg balance again after a week or so. If you can, try it with your eyes closed (ONLY if you can balance steadily on one leg for at least 10 seconds with your eyes open!) Always reach out to the wall or door jam for support if needed.

Ways to modify your activity

- **In sports:** Some athletes wear ankle braces to help with support during practice and competition. While this may be helpful in high levels of play, for most of us who don't work on strength and performance every day as our job, brace use can affect us in a negative way by teaching our muscles bad habits and becoming dependent on the braces.
- **At home:** Practice your balance training while doing everyday tasks. Try standing on one leg while you brush your teeth!

Also, make sure to keep moving your ankle when you are sitting for long periods of time by doing ankle pumps (simple up and down movements) or drawing letters of the alphabet with your foot.

Rehabilitation

A rehabilitation specialist will evaluate your foot and ankle to rule out more serious conditions, evaluate your strength, flexibility, and muscle balance. They will likely also perform a gait evaluation and have you do other functional tests to look at how your ankle, knee, hip and spine all work together. Then a complete program can be made for you to help you get back to your desired activities.