

# Ankle sprain

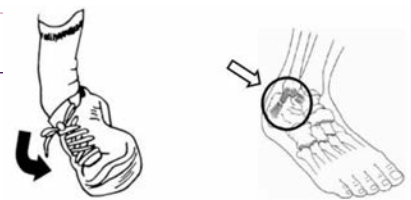
## Information and advice

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This information is designed to supplement the advice given by your doctor, and is written by physiotherapists based on the latest medical advice.

### What is an ankle sprain?

A sprain is a stretch or tear of the ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect one bone to another. There are several ligaments around the ankle joint, which can be sprained.



### What causes an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains normally occur when people 'go over' on their ankle – this commonly affects the outer ankle ligaments, which are overstretched, twisted or torn.

### What are the symptoms of an ankle sprain?

A sprained ligament can cause swelling, pain and sometimes bruising around the ankle joint. It is common for the bruising to 'track' down to the sole of the foot and toes. Movement of the ankle is painful and often people have difficulty in walking properly.

### What can you do to help an ankle sprain?

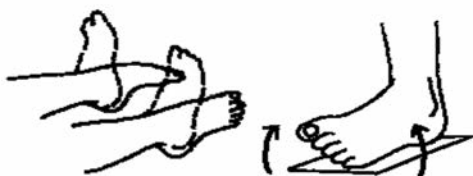
In the first 24-48 hours think of 'RICEM':

- **Rest** – rest the affected joint. Reduce or avoid excessive walking and standing. You may require a stick or crutches to help you walk.
- **Ice** – apply ice to the area as soon as possible for 10 minutes every two to three hours. A bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel is the best. Please do not do this if your skin sensation is impaired. Never apply ice directly to the skin as it can cause burns.
- **Compression** – a compression bandage or tubigrip may help to reduce the swelling. This should be worn from the base of your toes to just below the knee, making sure that even pressure is felt throughout. Check the area below the injury site for coldness/pallor which may suggest that the compression is too tight. Remove the compression when lying down. Do not apply compression if you have any problems with your circulation or if you have had a recent thrombosis.

- **Elevation** – the foot should be elevated whilst resting, ideally at least to the same level as your hip
- **Medications** – can be taken to help ease the pain and inflammation. Ask your GP or local pharmacist for advice. If your doctor has suggested medication it is important to take them as prescribed.

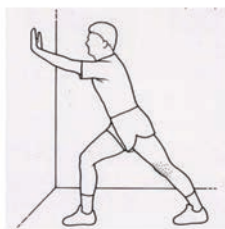
## After the first 24 hours try:

- **Ankle movements** – gently start moving the ankle in all normal directions, as shown in the diagram below. This will prevent it becoming stiff and make sure the ligament starts to heal correctly.



Move ankle up and down, in and out for one to three minutes, two to four times a day

- **Walking** – weight bear as soon as possible. Try to walk with even strides (heel first, then toe). Put as much weight through your foot as the pain allows. Wear sensible supportive shoes.
- **Exercise** – continue the exercises below when the pain is easing and the exercises become easier.



Place the affected foot behind. Keeping the back leg straight, bend the front knee gently lunging forwards – feel the stretch in the back of the calf. Continue by placing the back foot further behind.

Hold for 20 seconds, five times  
Repeat three to four times a day



Raise and lower your heel as high as possible. Start on both feet and progress to performing on just the affected side.

10 – 15 times  
Repeat three times a day

- **Physiotherapy** may be helpful for severe sprains, or if the symptoms are not settling. If you feel the exercises are making your pain worse, reduce the number or frequency of the exercises or stop and seek advice.

## You should see a doctor for your ankle sprain if:

- you have severe pain and swelling
- you cannot put ANY weight on the injured ankle
- you have numbness in the foot/ankle
- the pain and swelling does not settle. Most sprains improve after a few days, but the pain may take several weeks to go completely.

## Preventing sprains

- Use footwear that offers your feet and ankles support and protection, particularly when playing sport
- Take care on uneven surfaces when running or walking
- Once the pain has settled, practice balancing on the injured leg only, to help restore balance control.

### Legal Notice

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