

## What is an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains happen to people of all ages. They occur when you 'roll your ankle', which over-stretches the ligaments (the fibrous bands that hold the ankle together).

## What are the symptoms?

When ligaments are damaged, there is pain, swelling and sometimes bruising. Too much swelling can slow the healing process. Pain is usually worst in the first two to three days.

## Treatment

You may require an x-ray to determine if you have a broken bone (fracture).

Significant injuries may require an ankle brace, or even a plaster cast to allow ligaments to heal properly.

Some people who have repeated ankle sprains may need surgery to stabilize the weakened ligaments.

If you have pain, medications such as paracetamol (Panadol, Panamax), codeine, or a combination of both (panadeine) may help. Anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Nurofen, Advil) Naprosyn (Naprogesic) or diclofenac (Voltaren) can also help to reduce the swelling and pain. Ask your health-care professional what is best for you.

Crutches are not normally given out.

## Care of a sprained ankle

By using (RICE) - Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation for the first 2-3 days you can minimise the pain, swelling, & bruising.

- Rest - Avoid activities that cause pain. Minimise the amount of walking you do, but when you do walk, ensure that you walk as normal as possible. If you are unable to put weight on your leg comfortably, use crutches.
- Ice - Wrap ice cubes in a damp towel, use frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Apply to the injured area for 15-20 minutes every one to two hours while you are awake. Never apply ice directly to the skin.
- Compression - Apply a firm bandage from the toes to above the ankle. Ensure the bandage does not increase your pain or restrict blood flow to your toes. Remove any bandages when you sleep at night.

- Elevation - When resting, raise your foot so it is above the level of your heart.

Avoid 'HARM'

- Heat - Increases blood flow and swelling
- Alcohol - Increases blood flow and swelling, and can make you less aware of aggravating your injury
- Reinjury - Protect your joint until it has healed adequately
- Massage - Promotes blood flow and swelling. Massage can increase damage if begun too early.

## After 2-3 days

Your ankle should not swell or bruise further, but it will stay stiff and painful unless you gradually start to use it and exercise it. The following exercises will help. These exercises should be done twice a day or as often as your health care professional states:

### Weight Bearing

Start to walk as normally as possible without causing undue pain (heel hits floor first, then toes; step forwards over foot; then heel leaves floor, then toes leave floor).

Stretches (do three of each twice a day)

- Move ankle through all ranges of movement, up and down, down and in, up and out, circles.
- Lunge stretches - while standing or sitting, move your knee forward over your toes without lifting your heel from the floor. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Wall stretches - face wall, place injured ankle behind you, lean on wall, keep heel on the floor and tuck bottom in. Try with knee straight, then with knee bent. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Strengthening - repeat 10 times twice a day- stand on edge of step with heel over the edge; drop your heel down and hold for 5 seconds; then stand up on your toes for 5 seconds

### Strengthening

- Stand/walk on your toes.
- Stand/walk on your heels.
- Stand/walk on the inside edge of your foot.
- Stand/walk on the outside edge of your foot.

## Balance

- Balance board (wobble board)
- Stand on one leg – eyes open; eyes closed; swing arms; on mini trampoline; in sand.
- Walk – on slopes; forwards; backwards; sideways.

## What to expect

Most people fully recover in one to six weeks. If you are no better after a week, see your local doctor or physiotherapist. For more significant injuries, a physiotherapist can provide assistance with healing and rehabilitation. As the pain settles down after the first few days, gradually increase your level of activity.

Avoid activities on slippery or uneven surfaces and in areas with poor lighting.

## Prevention

There are simple measures you can take to reduce the risk of an ankle sprain.

- Warm up before exercise.
- Wear supportive shoes.
- Take care when exercising on uneven or slippery ground.
- Tape the ankle as directed by your physiotherapist.
- Cool down with slow stretches after exercise.

**Disclaimer:** This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

## Seeking help

In a medical emergency go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) provides health information, referral and triage services to the public in all parts of Queensland and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the cost of a local call\*.

\*Calls from mobile phones may be charged at a higher rate. Please check with your telephone service provider



## Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional
- Visit Healthinsite  
[www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)
- Visit the Better Health Channel  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

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## Notes:

## Follow up with:

Date and Time-

Name-

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