

Patient Information leaflet

Ankle Sprain

What is an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprain is one of the commonest injuries to the ankle. It results from a forceful bend to the ankle joint, which stretches or injures the ligaments that connect the ankle and the foot bones together.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms depend on the severity of the injury. The level of pain ranges from mild ache to severe pain. Other symptoms are swelling, bruising and difficulty in mobilising the ankle and weight bearing. It is important to be seen in the local hospital as the sprain may be associated with a small fracture in the ankle bone (requiring an x-ray assessment), and may require a short period of immobilisation.

How are the sprains treated?

Sprains are treated with an initial period of rest to let the acute phase settle down, followed by early mobilisation, weight bearing and aim to regain the normal function and walking.

The initial period involves the following:

Rest: Initial period of rest and avoiding heavy activities will allow the healing process to start and will prevent further injury. Gentle movements as the pain allows and attempt to weight bear minimally and gradually are recommended.

Ice Packing: Cold sponging helps to reduce the inflammation (pain and swelling). You can either use frozen ice packs made for this purpose or wrap some ice in a bag or a cloth (no direct application of ice on the skin) and use it for 5 to 10 minutes every 3 to 4 hours in the first few days.

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Pain Killers: Regular use of the routine (over the counter, Paracetamol and Ibuprofen) pain killers is recommended to help keeping the pain under control as it will help in improving the range of movements. Please adhere to the recommended dosage as recommended on the packs. You may not feel a complete pain relief initially but if you keep taking regular dosage (within the maximum limits) the pain will start to improve gradually.

Elevation: Elevating the ankle above the level of heart (or hip) is recommended in the first few days. It helps to reduce the swelling and pain.

Recovery

Recovery from ankle sprains depends on the severity of the initial injury. Healing time varies from person to person and may take several weeks (usually 6 to 12, in some cases even longer). Swelling, pain and bruising resolve gradually, if you follow the above treatment strategy.

It is important to start simple exercises to mobilise the ankle as the ankles are prone to become stiff after these injuries. You will be provided with an advice sheet from your local emergency department or clinic, or may need to be referred for formal physiotherapy if the injury is considered severe. A physiotherapist can advise on exercises and may give ultrasound or other treatments if swelling, pain or stiffness remains persistent. Physiotherapist can also help in regaining your weight bearing status.