

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

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Date published: 04/12/2019
Review date: 04/12/2021
Ref: EIM/Physio/AS/02

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Ankle sprain

A patient's guide

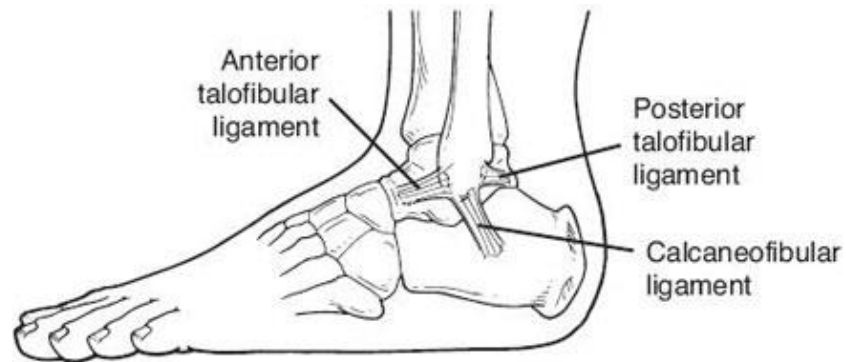


Introduction

This leaflet gives you information on ankle sprains and treatments.

Sprained ankles

One of the most common ankle injuries is the sprained ankle. An ankle sprain is when the ligaments (the strong fibrous tissue that connects bone to bone, like guy ropes) are damaged or torn through the joint being over-stretched.



Signs and symptoms

There will be increased pain that can get worse on movement. If the pain is severe, you may find it difficult to put weight through the leg. There may also be significant swelling and bruising (although it may take up to 24 hours for this to fully develop).

Recovery

As your symptoms improve, gradually build up your walking times and ease back into normal activity.

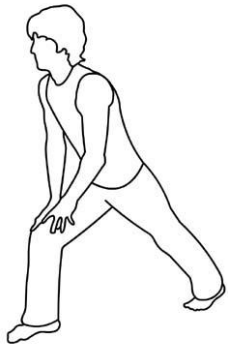
- Gentle exercise and getting back to normal will help the ligament heal quicker and stronger, continuing to rest it after the first few days will slow down the healing process.
- It is not unusual for it to be a bit sore when you restart a new activity for the first time, so get back to your usual activities gently. It might help to ice it again after you do something new, for example, going to the gym for the first time.
- It usually takes six to eight weeks to get back to normal activity.
- Physiotherapy can be very helpful in helping you maximise your recovery and reduce your risk of re-injury.

Exercise after five days

Sway your body weight gently onto the sore side and as able lift the good leg and practice balancing on your sore leg. Make sure you are near a wall for support. These shouldn't be painful. These exercises help gently get your balance back and helps prevent re-injury.



Lean against a wall for support. Put the good leg in front and the bad leg behind. Bend the front leg and straighten the back leg. You should feel a stretch in the calf of the back leg. Hold for 15-30 seconds and repeat three times (Figure A). Bring your feet closer together and repeat with the back leg bent (Figure B).



Treatment

The main priority is to reduce the swelling as much as possible.

The best advice is to rest to protect the swollen area while the tissues are healing. You may have been given crutches to use if appropriate.

Avoid excessive activity in the first few days and return to gentle walking as pain allows.

Ice will reduce swelling and bruising whilst helping ease pain. Wrap an ice pack or something from the freezer (i.e. bag of peas) in a damp towel and apply to area for 10-20 minutes. You should never apply ice directly to the skin. Using ice as a treatment is not advisable if you suffer from sensitivity to cold or have circulation problems.

Repeat every two hours for the first few days.

Compression will help reduce swelling and bruising.

Wear a compression (elasticated tubular) bandage. This should be removed regularly and at night to avoid circulation problems. Make sure this does not restrict movement or circulation.

Elevation will reduce the swelling - raise the foot above hip height. Try lying on your bed with your leg propped up by pillows.

Painkillers such as Paracetamol may be of help. However, it is advisable that you discuss this with your GP or Pharmacist before taking new medication.

Ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory drugs may slow down the healing in the early stages of recovery.

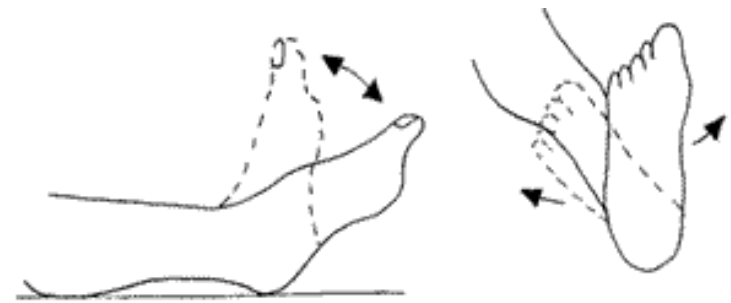
Do not use heat (hot water bottles or baths) as this may increase the swelling.

Early exercises

Begin gentle exercises within 48 to 72 hours of injury, as long as it doesn't cause excessive pain. After the first few days, it is important to gradually start moving your ankle and using it as this will help it heal quicker.

Do the exercises below every two hours.

Move your foot up and down as though pressing against something. Repeat 10 times.



Make circles with your foot, both clockwise and anti-clockwise. Repeat 10 times.

