

Ankle sprains

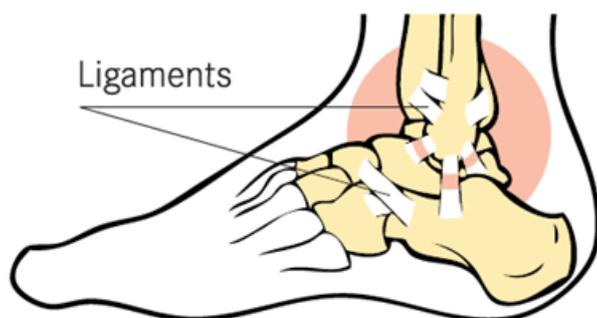
WHAT IS AN ANKLE SPRAIN?

Ankle sprains happen to people of all ages. They occur when you 'roll your ankle', which over-stretches the ligaments, which are the fibrous bands that hold the ankle bones together (see Figure 1).

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.

Figure 1: The ligaments supporting the ankle



TREATMENT

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

Most ligament injuries of the ankle will heal within four to six weeks. It is important to decrease swelling of the ankle as quickly as possible. This will begin healing and avoid stiffness.

It is very important to regain ankle movement and normal walking as soon as possible following an ankle injury. You might need crutches for a few days if there is pain while you walk; however, early return to normal walking is encouraged.

If you have pain, medications such as paracetamol may help. Anti-inflammatory medications can also help to reduce the swelling and pain, but speak to your healthcare professional to see if this is best for your injury.

Occasionally, very painful and swollen ankle injuries initially require a plaster cast. An ankle brace can also be used to support the ankle as the ligaments heal while also allowing movement and walking. Physiotherapy may also be recommended to prevent future injury.

Some people who have repeated ankle sprains may need surgery to stabilise the weakened ligaments if physiotherapy fails.

PREVENTION

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

- Warm up before exercise.
- Wear supportive shoes.
- If you have previously injured your ankle, physiotherapy will lessen your chances of re-injury. You may also need to tape or brace your ankle before sport. Speak to your healthcare professional for more information.

First aid for sprains

The initial treatment (first 72 hours) for ankle sprains is based on the 'RICE' principles: rest, ice, compression and elevation. RICE is most effective in conjunction with specific exercises (see over the page).

Relative rest

Avoid activities that cause pain. If you are unable to put weight through your ankle comfortably, use crutches.

Ice

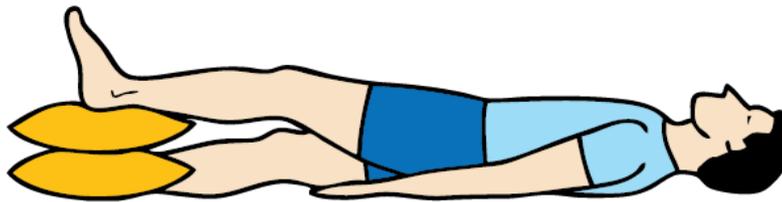
Wrap ice cubes, frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a damp towel and apply it to the injured area for 15–20 minutes up to every two hours while you are awake. Never apply ice directly to the skin.

Compression

A firm bandage from the toes to above the ankle may help to alleviate pain. Ensure the bandage does not increase your pain or restrict blood flow to your toes.

Elevation

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



Avoid 'HARM' in the first 48–72 hours – heat, alcohol, running and massage.

Heat

Increases blood flow and swelling.

Alcohol

Increases blood flow and swelling and can make you less aware of aggravating your injury.

Running/activity

An increase in heart rate increases blood flow and swelling. Protect your joint until it has healed adequately.

Massage

Promotes blood flow and swelling. Massage can increase damage if begun too early.

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.

Exercises

It is important to maintain flexibility and strength as you recover. Progress down the list of exercises as you are able. Perform each exercise three times, twice a day.

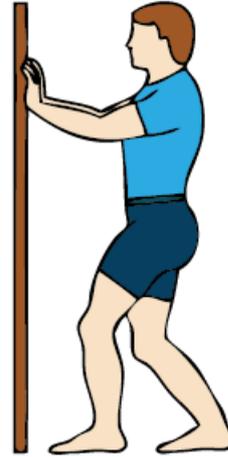
Exercise 1. Using a towel, pull your toes back as far as comfortable, and hold for 30 seconds.



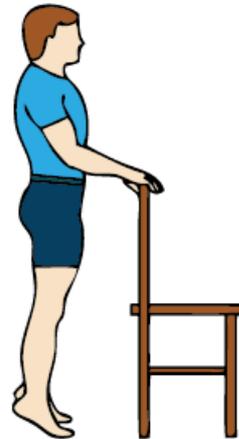
Exercise 2. Keeping your foot flat on the ground, slide it back under the chair and hold for 30 seconds.



Exercise 3. Keeping your foot flat on the ground, bend your knee towards the wall and hold for 30 seconds.



Exercise 4. Rise up and down on your toes as many times as you can in a row. Do this with just the injured leg when you can. To make it harder still, do this exercise on a step with your heels off the edge.



Exercise 5. Balance on one foot for as long as possible (total three minutes).

Seeking help

In a medical emergency call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

See your local doctor or healthcare professional if you have not improved at all after a week, especially if you are still unable to put weight on your leg.

For health advice from a registered nurse you can call NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day on 1300 60 60 24 for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to interpreting services for callers not confident with English.

* Calls from mobiles may be charged at a higher rate.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional.
- Contact a physiotherapist
choose.physio/findaphysio.
- Visit the Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 9096 7770, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email emergencycare.clinicalnetwork@safercare.vic.gov.au

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