

Ankle injury

Emergency Department Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have an ankle injury. It includes information about what an ankle injury is, how it is treated and what you need to do when you get home.

What is an ankle sprain / soft tissue injury?

An ankle sprain is one of the most common types of soft tissue injury. This term means there has been an injury to the non-bony structures of the ankle (skin, ligaments and or tendons). It occurs when the foot is moved through a greater range of movement than normal. This stretches and weakens the soft tissues and ligaments that support the ankle.

The main symptoms are:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Bruising – this may not show until later.
- Difficulty moving the ankle normally or putting weight on it.

Soft tissue ankle injuries will not show up on X rays. Therefore, you will not need an X ray if a bone injury can be ruled out by the practitioner who sees you.

How long does it take to heal?

The initial pain usually settles after a few days and during this time it is important to follow the simple treatment advice in this leaflet to ensure a good recovery.

The soft tissues (muscles and ligaments) normally take around six weeks to heal. This timeframe may vary as everyone recovers from injuries at different rates and some sprains can be worse than others.

You are more likely to sprain your ankle if you have sprained it before and it isn't fully healed. Be careful on uneven surfaces, going up and down stairs, and walking in shoes that are not supportive.

How can it be treated?

- **Painkillers:** If your doctor has prescribed painkillers, then these should be taken at the recommended dose. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are usually prescribed but they are not suitable for everyone so please speak with your doctor before using them.
- **Cold packs:** A cold pack - an ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel - can also provide short-term pain relief. Apply to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours. Do not apply this directly to your skin as it can cause burns.
- **Rest:** Try to rest the foot for the first 24 - 72 hours. However, it is important to maintain flexibility in the ankle so you can gently move it without causing too much pain. This will ensure your ankle does not become too stiff and it will help the healing process.
- **Elevation:** Raise your ankle above the level of your hips to reduce swelling. You can use pillows to keep the foot up.
- **Early movement and exercise:** Early weight bearing (putting weight through your injured foot) has been shown to help your ankle heal more quickly. For this reason, most people with an ankle sprain will not be given crutches.

We no longer bandage ankle sprains as this doesn't reduce pain nor improve recovery time and may delay your time to full recovery. Try to walk as normally as possible as this will help your recovery.

What should I avoid?

In the first 48 - 72 hours after injury avoid the following as they may make your symptoms worse:

- Hot baths or showers
- Heat packs or heat rubs
- Drinking alcohol
- Massage

Exercise

Exercising will strengthen your ligaments and muscles. Repeat the exercises below at least three times a day. Start with two sets of 10 for each exercise, build up to three sets of 10 and increase the weight gradually.

- Point your foot up and down
- Make circles with your foot. Change direction.
- Place your foot on the floor. Rock your foot from side to side, lifting the inner and then outer border of your foot
- Sit with your leg straight out in front of you. Put a towel around your foot and pull it up towards you. Feel the stretch in the back of your calf.

General advice

Keep your ankle moving, as much as pain allows.

The sooner you start exercising, the better your recovery.

Once you have recovered, continue to keep your body healthy with exercise.

Strengthen your ankles to prevent future injuries.

When should I seek help?

The length of time it takes for your ankle to recover depends on the severity of the original injury. It can take a few months to regain full function but your symptoms should not be worsening.

If the pain and swelling have not shown improvement within a week and you are unable to weight-bear, please seek further medical advice from your general practitioner.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Sprains/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to one of our nurses. If you need help when you return home, please contact your GP.

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/accident-emergency/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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