

Sprains

What is a sprain?

A sprain is an injury that causes a stretch or a tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect bones at a joint.

Sprains may be classified as mild, moderate, or severe.

How does it occur?

A twisting or severe stretching of a joint is the usual cause of a sprain.

What are the symptoms?

Your joint is swollen and painful.

You may not be able to move the injured joint.

The skin of the joint may be red at first. In a few hours to days, it may look bruised.

How are sprains diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine your injury. You may have an x-ray to make sure you have not broken a bone.

How are sprains treated?

The general rule for treating sprains is R-I-C-E:

- ▶ **Rest:** At first you will need to avoid activities that cause pain. If you have an ankle sprain or knee sprain you may need crutches.

- ▶ **Ice:** Put ice packs on the sprained area for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours. Do this for 2 to 3 days or until the swelling goes away.
- ▶ **Compression:** Your health care provider may recommend that you wrap an elastic bandage around your injured joint to reduce swelling.
- ▶ **Elevation:** Keep the injured joint above the level of your heart as much as you can until the swelling stops.

Also:

- ▶ Your health care provider may give you a device to help support the joint, such as a splint, brace, or sling.
- ▶ Your health care provider may recommend anti-inflammatory medication or another pain reliever.
- ▶ You may be given exercises to help you recover faster.
- ▶ Some sprains with complete tearing of ligaments may need surgery.

How can I prevent a sprain?

Most sprains occur from accidents that are not easily prevented. However, make sure you wear proper shoes for your activities. Watch for uneven surfaces when you are walking or exercising.