

# HOW TO CARE FOR AND TREAT YOUR ANKLE SPRAINS

## What is an ankle sprain?

The injury that occurs when your foot "rolls," or turns in on itself, is called an ankle sprain. In this injury, the ligaments that hold the ankle and foot bones in place are stretched and weakened.

## What should I do after an ankle sprain?

Many doctors recommend that you use the RICE treatment after a sprain:

- R=** Rest. Stay off the injured ankle to help it heal. This also helps prevent further injury. Your doctor might have you use crutches if walking is too painful. Stay off your feet most of the time until you can walk without pain.
- I =** Ice. Ice helps keep the swelling down. It also helps to reduce pain. Put an ice pack on the ankle for 15 minutes. Take the ice off for 10 minutes. Put ice back on for 10 minutes. Then use ice for 15 minutes at a time three times a day for two more days.
- C=** Compression. Compression (wrapping the ankle with a strip of elastic cloth) will help decrease swelling and support your ankle. You can use an elastic wrap from the drugstore, or get an air splint from your doctor. (Your doctor will show you how to use it.) Be careful not to wrap the ankle too tightly. That would slow the blood flow to your foot. Use the elastic bandage for 1 to 2 days.
- E =** Elevation. Keeping your foot raised helps decrease pain and swelling. When you elevate your ankle, try to keep it around the level of your heart. Lying on a couch with pillows under your foot is better than sitting in a chair with your foot on a footstool. Try to keep your foot elevated for 2 to 3 hours a day.

## What can I take for pain?

Most doctors recommend anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen (brand names: Advil, Medipren, Motrin, Nuprin), naprosyn (brand name: Aleve) or ketoprofen (brand name: Orudis KT). You can also take acetaminophen (brand names: Tylenol, Datril, Panadol), although this medicine isn't an anti-inflammatory.

## After my ankle sprain heals, what can I do to strengthen my ankle?

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It's important for you to strengthen your ankle after a sprain. This helps prevent another injury. Use elastic tubing (available at drug stores and most sports equipment stores) and follow a few basic exercises, described below. Do 10 repetitions of each exercise (this is called a "set"); do three sets of each exercise, twice a day. For example, in the morning, you'll do 40 repetitions (four exercises, 10 times each) three times. In the evening, you'll do another 40 repetitions three times.

## **Exercises After an Ankle Sprain**

- Sit on a firm chair, or stand up. Loop one end of the tubing around the ball of the foot with the injured ankle. Hold the other end of the tubing in your hand. Put your heel on the floor. Stretch the tubing by pushing down with your foot, the way you push on the gas pedal of a car.
- Sit on a firm chair, or stand up. Loop one end of the tubing around the leg of a sturdy table. Loop the other end of the tubing around the foot with the injured ankle. Stretch the tubing by pulling up with your foot (lifting up your foot), using your ankle, as if you were trying to pull the table toward you. (This motion is the opposite of trying to "step on the gas.")
- Sit on a firm chair, or stand up. Loop one end of the tubing around the leg of a sturdy table. Loop the other end of the tubing around the foot with the injured ankle. Stretch the tubing by moving your foot out to the side, away from the leg of the table.
- Sit on a firm chair, or stand up. Loop one end of the tube around the leg of a sturdy table. Loop the other end of the tubing around the foot with the injured ankle. Stretch the tubing by moving your foot in to the middle, toward your good ankle.

You can also do these exercises with your uninjured ankle, to keep it strong and less likely to sprain.

## **What can I do to help prevent another ankle sprain?**

- Wear flat shoes instead of high heels.
- When taking part in a sporting activity, wear a lace-up ankle support (brace) for added protection.
- If you don't like lace-up ankle braces, wear an elastic slip-on support. (It won't be as protective as the lace-up ankle brace.)
- Don't stop doing the ankle exercises after your ankle feels better. Keep doing the exercises several times a week to keep your ankles strong.