



Urgent care

Ankle sprain advice

What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments of the ankle joint. These are elastic-band-like structures which hold the bones of the ankle joint together and prevent excess twisting and turning.

These ligaments normally stretch slightly and then retract back to their normal shape and size. A sprain occurs when these ligaments have been stretched beyond their limits. In a severe sprain, these ligaments may be partially or completely torn.

These tears may take several weeks to heal completely and you may have pain and swelling for up to three weeks. You may notice this more in the evening after a lot of walking.

These symptoms will get less with time and healing will take place more rapidly if the following is followed.

Painkillers

Take regular analgesia to help you move more easily and to gently exercise the injured limb. Paracetamol is ideal. If paracetamol does not help a stronger painkiller such as codeine may be required. This is only available on prescription.

Oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS, like ibuprofen) can also help reduce swelling and inflammation but should only be used three days after the injury has occurred because if they are used before this time they may adversely affect the healing process.

Rest

Rest the injured limb for the next 24 - 48 hours with the foot elevated but gently mobilise the injured area to prevent stiffness.

Ice

Ice may be applied to the ankle for up to 20 minutes every two hours for the first 24 - 48 hours. A bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel is ideal. **Do not** apply ice directly to the skin as this may cause a cold burn.

Elevation

The leg should be elevated while resting. This means that your ankle should be at a higher level than your heart. Avoid having long periods of time when the leg is not rested.

Exercises

It is important to move your ankle and to start walking normally (without a limp) as soon as you are able to. Wear flat shoes which support the foot and be careful on uneven ground. Exercises will strengthen the muscles around your ankle providing added support to the joint. The use of compression to reduce swelling is not recommended.

Exercises

- Draw your foot up as far as possible, with toes pointing towards you. Hold for five seconds. Then point your foot away from you as far as possible. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times.
- Turn the sole of your foot inwards, keeping your knee still. Hold for five seconds. Then turn the sole of your foot outwards, keeping your knee still. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times.
- Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor. Slide the foot of your injured ankle along the floor behind you, making sure you keep your foot on the floor. Repeat ten times.
- Sit on a chair and place a towel flat on the floor. Put the foot of your injured ankle on the towel, with you heel on the edge. Using your toes, bunch the towel, and pull it towards you.
- Sit on a chair, feet flat on the floor. Try to keep your heels directly below your knees if possible. Raise the front parts of your feet off the floor, keeping your heels on the floor. Hold for five seconds and then lower. Now raise your heels off the floor, keeping the balls of your feet on the floor. Hold for five seconds and then lower. Repeat ten times.
- Sitting on a high chair, use your foot as a 'pen' and try writing out the alphabet in the air. Do this three to four times a day.

It will be safe to return to normal activity when you:

- have full strength
- have full range of movement
- can use your ankle without pain or swelling

If you have persistent problems with pain, swelling or loss of function, or your ankle is not recovering at the rate you expect, please contact your GP.

If there is no significant improvement in two weeks or you are continuing to have problems you should make an appointment to see your GP.

Grade of sprain:

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Things to avoid

For the first **72 hours** after an injury you should avoid the following.

- **Heat:** such as hot baths, saunas and heat packs.
- **Alcohol:** drinking alcohol increased bleeding and swelling and decreases healing.
- **Running:** or any form of exercise that could cause more damage.
- **Massage:** which will increase bleeding and swelling.
- **Driving:** if you have sprained your ankle you should avoid driving until the strength and mobility has returned to your ankle. The length of time that you will be unable to drive for will depend on the extent of your injury and how quickly you recover.

For further advice please contact:

Abingdon Minor Injury Unit	01865 903476
Henley Minor Injury Unit	01865 903755
Witney Minor Injury Unit	01865 903841
Wallingford First Aid Unit	01865 903471
Bicester First Aid Unit	01865 903976

Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on freephone 0800 328 7971.

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

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This department is part of our Older People Directorate.