

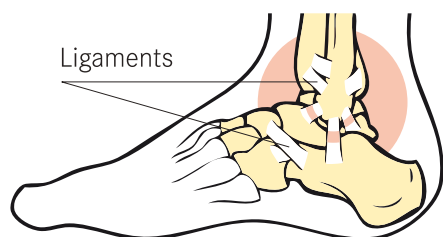
Ankle sprains

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* (the fibrous bands that hold the ankle together).

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.



Treatment

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

Significant injuries may require an ankle brace, or even a plaster cast to allow ligaments to heal properly.

Some people who have repeated ankle sprains may need surgery to stabilize the weakened ligaments.

If you have pain, medications such as paracetamol, codeine (or a combination of both) may help. Anti-inflammatory medications can also help to reduce the swelling and pain. Ask your health-care professional what is best for you.

Prevention

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

- Warm up before exercise.
- Wear supportive shoes.
- Take care when exercising on uneven or slippery ground.
- Tape the ankle as directed by your physiotherapist.
- Cool down with slow stretches after exercise.

First aid for sprains

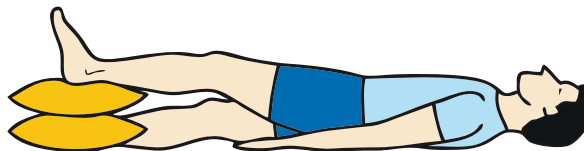
The initial treatment (first 72 hours) for ankle sprains is based on the '**RICE**' principles: Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

Rest Avoid activities that cause pain. If you are unable to put weight on your leg comfortably, use crutches.

Ice Wrap ice cubes in a damp towel, use frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Apply to the injured area for 15-20 minutes every one to two hours while you are awake. Never apply ice directly to the skin.

Compression Apply a firm bandage from the toes to above the ankle. Ensure the bandage does not increase your pain or restrict blood flow to your toes. Remove any bandages when you sleep at night.

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



Avoid 'HARM' – Heat, Alcohol, Re-injury and Massage. In the first 48-72 hours, **avoid**:

Heat Increases blood flow and swelling.

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

Reinjury Protect your joint until it has healed adequately.

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



Ankle sprains

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 by doing the gentle exercises shown below. Perform each exercise three times. Do this once or twice a day, as you are able.

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.



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Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



See your local doctor or health care 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. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Contact a physiotherapist.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Notes:

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 8064 or email edfactsheets@dhs.vic.gov.au

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