

ANKLE SPRAINS

This information is for patients who have been told by a medical professional that they have a sprained ankle and not any other form of ankle injury.

An ankle sprain occurs when there is injury to one or more of the ankle ligaments. Ankle ligaments provide ankle support and stability, holding the ankle joint in place. When an ankle ligament is injured, there is immediate pain and swelling and consequently the stability and thus function of the ankle joint is affected. The degree of instability and loss of function is dependent upon on the severity of ankle ligament injury; some ankle sprains are more severe than others.

Ankle sprains commonly occur when the ankle buckles or gives way underneath the patient often when landing on uneven surface. This causes the ankle ligaments to stretch and or possibly tear resulting in pain and swelling. Severe pain and swelling can limit ankle function (movement), coordination, balance (proprioception) and therefore weight bearing ability.

Once diagnosed with an ankle sprain, rehabilitation can begin immediately. The aim of treatment is to control the pain, reduce the swelling and introduce early ankle mobilisation, thus allowing for the damaged ligament to heal and return to normal function. Depending upon the severity of the ankle sprain, it can take up to several weeks for it to settle down.

TREATMENT

In the first 24-48 hours, the RICE protocol is followed

Rest – keep off the ankle until weight bearing is tolerable, however the ankle should be kept moving as pain allows (see exercises below)

Ice – ice the ankle at least three times a day

Compression – elastic bandage (tubigrip) from the toes to the knee will help reduce the swelling. Keep the bandage on during the day and take it off whilst sleeping at night.

Elevation – whenever you are sitting try and rest the ankle on a stool preferably higher than your hips

As soon as it is comfortable gentle ankle exercises should be encouraged. Early ankle exercises will encourage ankle function recovery and facilitate damaged ligament healing.

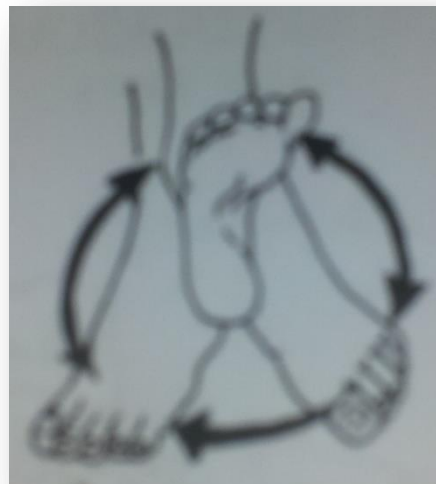
Exercise 1 – ankle flexion/extension

Point your toes upwards and hold for 5 seconds. Then point your toes downwards and hold for 5 seconds.



Exercise 2 – ankle rotation

Move your ankle in a large circle clockwise and then anticlockwise



Exercise 3

Place your foot flat on the floor with the towel as shown. Keeping heel on floor, repetitively “scrunch up” the towel and release



Exercise 4 – calf

Sit on the chair with your feet touching the floor. Push your toes down to raise the heel as shown and hold for 5 seconds



Exercise 5

Pull your toes towards your body as shown until you feel a stretch and hold for 5 seconds.



Exercise 6 – balance retraining (proprioception)

One leg standing

Lift up your good leg and stand on one leg as long as you can



If the pain and swelling does not begin to settle or you are unable to perform the above exercises. You may have a more serious ankle sprain and may need a more intensive rehabilitation program. Such things may include a greater rest period with potential temporary plaster cast immobilisation or physiotherapy. All of which can be assessed and organised by your GP.