

TREATING SPRAINS AND STRAINS

Generally treating injury to the muscle/ tendon unit (strain) and mild injury to the ligaments (sprain) is performed in the same way. The known acronym is R I C E R. This stands for rest, ice, compression, elevation and rehabilitation.

REST

This refers to immobilization or relative immobilization of the extremity. This may involve a brace, cast or splint but also may simply mean avoiding any activity that causes pain to the involved area.

ICE

Ice is best applied in a “Crushed” or circulating form. A “Zip-lock” with crushed ice works well. Apply this for 20-30 minutes over a towel or other protection.

COMPRESSION

Generally an expandable wrap such as an ace wrap works best initially following a strain or sprain. This allows compression on the extremity in a controllable fashion. It can be tightened or loosened for comfort. A compression wrap should not be uncomfortable and should not lead to swelling below the wrap.

ELEVATION

The extremity should be kept elevated to heart level or above. This will allow the circulation to adequately get to the extremity and lead to less swelling in the injured part. Placing several comfortable pillows under the extremity works very well. By eliminating swelling not only will the pain be less but the tissues which are separated by the swelling will be closer to their normal position and lead to more rapid healing.

REHABILITATION

This is often the forgotten part of healing. When the athlete is ready to return to sports they often times do not give adequate attention to rehabilitation. This leads to a greater chance of re-injury to the same extremity or another body part. The use of supervised physical therapy can often time speed up the recovery. In general you first want to regain range of motion without pain. When this is accomplished you progress to strengthening exercises with a goal of having strength similar to the opposite side. Progression is then made to sports specific exercises in a controlled manner. This may involve cutting, jumping, twisting etc. When this is all accomplished it is finally the time to return to practice and ultimately competitive situations. Try to meet each milestone and not be too rapid in returning to sport in order to prevent re-injury.