

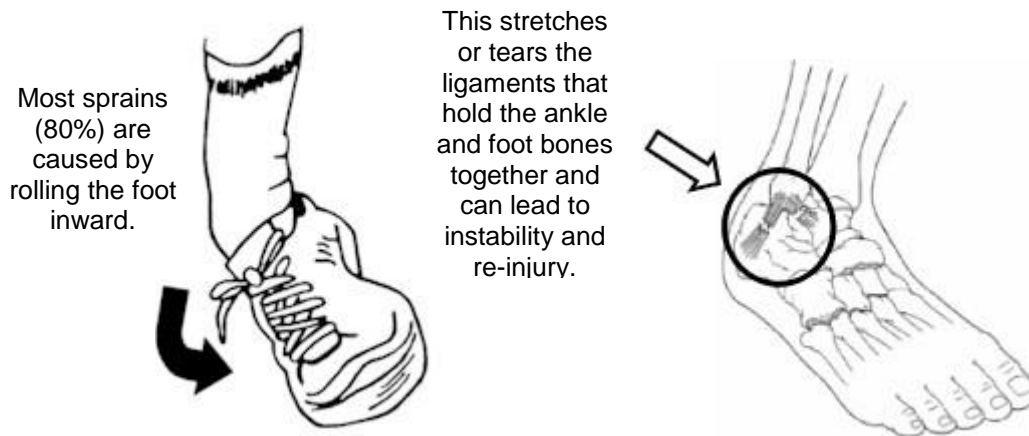
METROCREST ORTHOPAEDICS AND SPORTS MEDICINE

Ankle Sprains

The Injury

A sprained ankle is a very common injury. Approximately 25,000 people experience it each day. An ankle sprain can happen to athletes and non-athletes, children and adults. It can happen when you take part in sports and physical fitness activities. It can also happen when you simply step on an uneven surface, or step down at an angle.

Ankle sprains are one of the most common sports injuries. They occur when a ligament connecting bones or cartilage of the ankle is ruptured or torn. Ankle sprains happen when the foot twists, rolls or turns beyond its normal motions and usually is the result of the ankle turning in. This causes the ligaments to stretch beyond their normal range in an abnormal position



Ankle sprains are immediately and severely painful and incapacitating; they can often develop into a chronic problem. If treated quickly and properly, however, ankle sprains can heal well, allowing a safe and early return to activity.

Three Degrees of Severity Ankle sprains are graded into three degrees of severity. The more severe the sprain, the longer it takes to recover.

First Degree This injury is the most common and, if not neglected, the most minor. Ligaments connecting the bones of the ankle are stretched but not torn, with little swelling and no instability. With a first-degree injury, you can expect to be back to sports within a couple of weeks.
Treatment: Physical Therapy

Second Degree Ankle ligaments are partially torn, and the ankle usually swells immediately. There is bruising. A second-degree ankle sprain may require a three to six week rest before you return to full activity.
Treatment: Air-stirrup or brace, Physical Therapy

Third Degree This injury is a more serious tear of ligaments, but rarely requires surgery. A third-degree ankle sprain requires eight to twelve months for ligaments to full heal.
Treatment: Fracture boot for 2-4 weeks and then progress into an ankle brace.

Ankle sprains may turn out to be other less common injuries. For these patients who fail to respond to treatment, further tests may be indicated to diagnose other conditions.

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TREATMENT: Divided into 4 stages

Stage 1: Up to 72 hours: To reduce pain and swelling follow the RICE protocol:

Rest - Avoid putting any pressure on your ankle by not walking on it.

Ice - Apply ice or a cold pack to the ankle for 15-20 minutes, 4 times a day for at least 2 to 3 days. This helps reduce pain and swelling. Wrap the ice or cold pack in a towel. Do not apply the ice directly to your skin.

Compression - Wrap your ankle in an elastic compression bandage (e.g., Ace bandage). This will limit swelling of your ankle.

Elevation - Keep your ankle raised above the level of your heart for 48 hours.

This will help drain fluid and reduce swelling.

Depending on the injury, a splint, or a cast may be applied to immobilize the ankle. Anti-inflammatory/analgesic medications may be prescribed to relieve the pain and reduce the swelling and inflammation.

Stage 2: 1st Week: Walking on the ankle can begin as soon as it feels comfortable.

Crutches can be used as partial support when walking is begun. Further support of the ankle may be needed in the form of a brace or cast. Pain should be the guide as to how much activity is enough. The ankle will get stiff after an injury and it is important to maintain the full range of motion of the ankle, even with external support.

Stage 3: 2nd week or longer: This is the most crucial stage to ensure proper healing of the ankle. A rehabilitation program should be started by this stage. The main goal of the rehabilitation program is to regain ankle flexibility and strengthen supporting muscles. The rehabilitation program can be performed at home or with a physical therapist. The physical therapist will instruct and educate the ankle sprain patient on the proper techniques with exercises and progress the patient through the rehabilitation continuum. Unless the injury is very severe, usually only 1-3 visits are needed after this injury.

Stage 4: Variable: The ankle must be strong before returning to full daily activity or sports. Too early of a return may lead to re-injury and a chronic problem. Returning to activities or sports can be done when:

- The ankle has full range of motion in all directions
- Strength is restored in all muscles around the ankle, including the calf
- Balance is restored
- No pain or swelling with exercise or activity
- No pain or instability with cutting (zigzags)

Running can begin once the injured athlete can stand on the toes of the injured ankle for 20 seconds and hop on your toes 10 times without pain or instability. Initially jogging should be performed in a straight line. As the ankle becomes stronger, running can progress to include Figure of 8's. Finally, the athlete can cut a zigzag. The ankle should be protected for a minimum of 6 months after the injury. Be sure and follow the doctor's advice.

Prevention

- The best way to prevent ankle sprains is to maintain good strength, muscle balance, and flexibility.
- Warm-up before doing exercises and vigorous activities
- Pay attention to walking, running or working surfaces
- Wear good shoes
- Pay attention to you body's warning signs to slow down when pain or fatigue is noted