



Treatment for a Sprained Ankle

What's to be gained?

Thousands of people seek medical attention for an ankle sprain each year. How you approach the next few weeks will determine the speed and completeness of recovery. The power to resume your normal routine rests with you.

Getting started

When an injury occurs, think “RICE” in the initial treatment period.

- **R**est: stay off your foot for 1-2 days, with only minimal weight bearing for essential activities. Use crutches if you are uncomfortable. Gradually increase to full weight bearing within 3-5 days after the injury.
- **I**ce: begin with ½ hour on, 1 hour off. Continue this for the first 1-2 days to reduce swelling. Just place a wet washcloth over the injury, put some ice in a plastic bag, and lay the bag over the washcloth. Wrap a towel or ace wrap around the ice pack to hold it in place. (Do not do this if you have a circulation problem or diabetes unless instructed by your physician.) Never use heat.
- **C**ompression: wrap an ace bandage or elastic ankle sleeve around the injury to reduce swelling. This may be used for 2-4 weeks.
- **E**levation: raise your ankle when you are resting, preferably higher than your heart. Continue this until pain and swelling have stopped.

If your provider has recommended a splint or ankle support, use it as directed.

Initial exercise goal: restore range of motion

- Alphabet writing: pretend your big toe is a pen. Sit on a table. Trace the alphabet (A-Z), in capitals, with your injured foot 2 times in a row for 3 times a day. Do not move your knee with this exercise.
- Range of motion: sit on a table and move your foot up (toward your face) for 2 sets of 5-10 repetitions twice a day. Do the same by moving your foot down, then to the left, and finally to the right. If this is too painful, have a partner support your foot so that you can push against their hands in each of the 4 directions without movement.



Once you can complete these exercises, move to the following activities:

Increasing Activity

- As you are able to get around better, consider daily walking (1/2 to 1 mile). An exercise bike is also excellent at 15-20 minutes daily.

Stretching

Perform each of the following 3 stretches three (3) times a day.

- Towel stretch: sit on the floor with your legs straight and knees slightly bent. Fold a towel lengthwise and position it around the ball of your foot. Gently pull your foot toward your face. Repeat 10 times, holding each stretch for 5 seconds.
- Wall stretch: place your hands on a wall in front of you, supporting your weight on the uninjured leg. Extend the injured leg behind your body with your heel flat on the floor and lean forward for 10 seconds. Do not rock back and forth. Perform 5 repetitions.
- Toe standing: standing near support, slowly lift up on the balls of the both feet. Hold it as high as you can for 5 seconds. Perform 15 repetitions.

Strengthening

- Towel slides: set a 10 pound weight on one end of an open towel lying flat on the floor. (A heavy book can be used.) Place your injured foot on the other end of the towel and alternatively slide your foot away from your body and inward toward your body, pivoting at the heel in each direction. Do this 10 times each way twice a day.
- Rubber tubing exercises: hold a loop of heavy rubber tubing around your foot and grasp it with both hands (or try a bungee tie-down cord instead). Push your foot downward, stretching the tubing. Do 2 sets of 10 exercises twice a day. Repeat the exercises for the other 3 directions, repositioning the tubing.

Position Sense Training

- This is the most difficult exercise and may need to be started 1-3 weeks after the injury. Stand on your injured foot, raise the uninjured foot (bend at the knee), and bounce a ball around you. This exercise helps the nerves, muscles, and ligaments “remember” how to respond to your body’s movements. Build up to 5 minutes twice a day.

Additional information:

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/healthy/physical/injuries/010.html>

American Orthopedic Foot and Ankle Society

http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00150&return_link=0

http://www.emedicinehealth.com/ankle_sprain/article_em.htm

