

Ankle Sprain

KEY POINTS

- An ankle sprain is stretching or tearing of one or more ligaments in your ankle. Your ankle has many bones, muscles, and ligaments that attach your foot to your leg.
 - Change or stop doing the activities that cause pain until the sprain heals.
 - An ankle sprain can be treated with braces, ice, exercise, and sometimes with medicine or surgery.
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What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain is an injury to one or more ligaments in your ankle. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect one bone to another to form the joints. Your ankle has many bones, muscles, and ligaments that attach your foot to your leg. When a ligament is injured, it can be stretched, partially torn, or completely torn.

What is the cause?

A sprain is caused by an activity that twists your ankle, like tripping on the stairs or falling during a sporting event.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain
- Swelling and bruising
- Trouble using or moving your ankle

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms, activities, and medical history and examine you. You may have X-rays or other scans.

How it is treated?

You will need to change or stop doing the activities that cause pain until the ligament has healed.

Your healthcare provider may recommend stretching and strengthening exercises to help you heal more quickly.

Use an elastic bandage or an ankle brace as directed by your provider. You may need to use crutches until you can walk without pain.

If your ankle ligaments are completely torn, you may need surgery. After surgery, your ankle will be in a cast for 4 to 8 weeks.

The pain often gets better within a few weeks with self-care, but some injuries may take several months or longer to heal. It's important to follow all your healthcare provider's instructions.

How can I take care of myself?

To reduce swelling and pain for the first few days after the injury:

- Put an ice pack, gel pack, or package of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth on the injured area every 3 to 4 hours for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- Keep your foot up on pillows so that it is above the level of your heart when you sit or lie down.
- Take nonprescription pain medicine, such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, you should not take these medicines for more than 10 days.
 - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Ask your healthcare provider before taking NSAIDs if you have bruising around the ankle. Putting an NSAID gel on your skin can decrease pain, with fewer side effects than pills taken by mouth. Ask your healthcare provider if a prescription is right for you.
 - Acetaminophen may cause liver damage or other problems. Unless recommended by your provider, don't take more than 3000 milligrams (mg) in 24 hours. To make sure you don't take too much, check other medicines you take to see if they also contain acetaminophen. Ask your provider if you need to avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medicine.

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions, including any exercises recommended by your provider. Ask your provider:

- How and when you will get your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- If there are activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

How can I help prevent an ankle sprain?

Warm-up exercises and stretching before activities can help prevent injuries. Exercises to improve balance can help prevent ankle sprains. A physical therapist or athletic trainer can teach you these exercises.

Follow safety rules and use any protective equipment recommended for your work or sport. For example, wear the right type of shoes for your activities, and tape your ankle or wear a brace for strenuous sports, especially if you have hurt your ankle before. Avoid running or playing on uneven surfaces.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

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