

Understanding Ankle Sprains



What Causes Ankle Sprains?

The ankle is one of the most common places in the body for a sprain. Every day thousands of people sprain their ankles. Landing wrong on your foot can cause the ankle to roll to the side. This can stretch or tear ligaments. Ankle sprains can occur at any time, such as when you step off a curb or play sports. Once you've had an ankle sprain, you may be more likely to sprain that ankle again.



Symptoms

Your symptoms depend on how badly the ligaments are damaged. You may have little pain and swelling if the ligaments are only stretched. If the ligaments tear, you will have more pain and swelling. The more severe the sprain, the less you'll be able to move the ankle or put weight on it. The ankle may also turn black-and-blue, and the bruising may extend into the foot and leg.

Inside Your Ankle

Your ankle joint is where the bones in your leg and foot meet. Strong bands of tissue called **ligaments** connect these bones. Muscles run from the lower leg across the ankle into the foot. The ligaments and muscles help keep the ankle joint stable when you move.

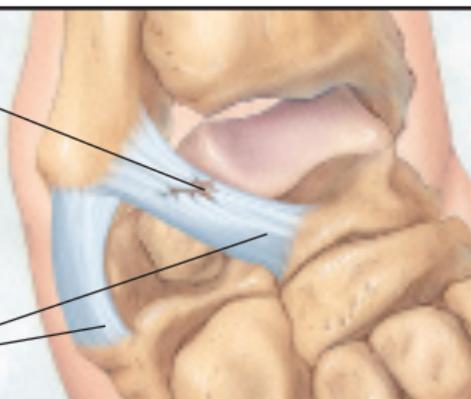
When Ligaments Tear

If you twist or turn your ankle, the ligaments can stretch or tear. This is called a **sprain**. A sprain can be mild, moderate, or severe. This depends on how badly the ligaments are damaged.

Mild sprains

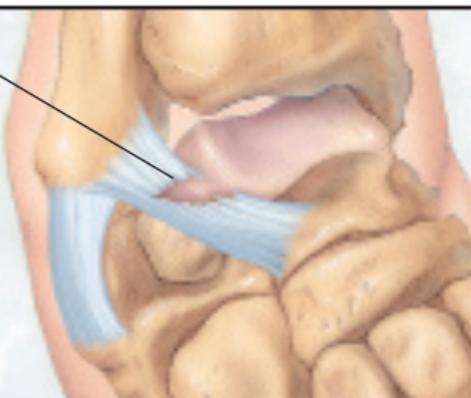
occur when ligaments are stretched or slightly torn.

Ligaments



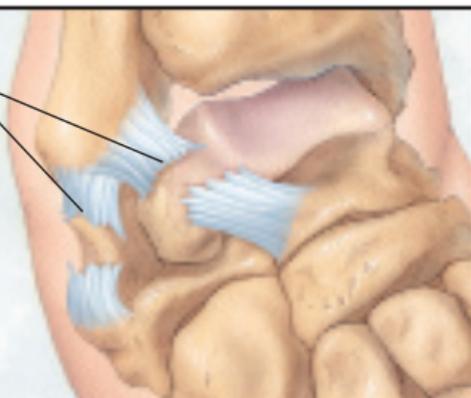
Moderate sprains

occur when ligaments are partly torn.



Severe sprains

occur when ligaments are completely torn.



Diagnosis and Treatment

Your doctor will look at your ankle and ask about your symptoms. You may also have x-rays to rule out a broken bone. Treatment will depend on how bad your sprain is. For a severe sprain, healing may take 3 months or more.



Medication

Your doctor may suggest an oral anti-inflammatory medication, such as ibuprofen. This relieves the pain and helps reduce any swelling. Be sure to take your medication as directed.

Right After Your Injury

Rest: At first, keep weight off the ankle as much as you can. You may be given crutches to help you walk without putting weight on the ankle.

Ice: Put an ice pack on the ankle for 15 minutes. Remove the pack and wait at least 30 minutes. Repeat for up to 3 days. This helps reduce swelling.

Compression: To reduce swelling and keep the joint stable, you may need to wrap the ankle with an elastic bandage. For more severe sprains, you may need an ankle brace or a cast.

Elevation: To reduce swelling, keep your ankle raised above your heart when you sit or lie down.

Contrast Baths

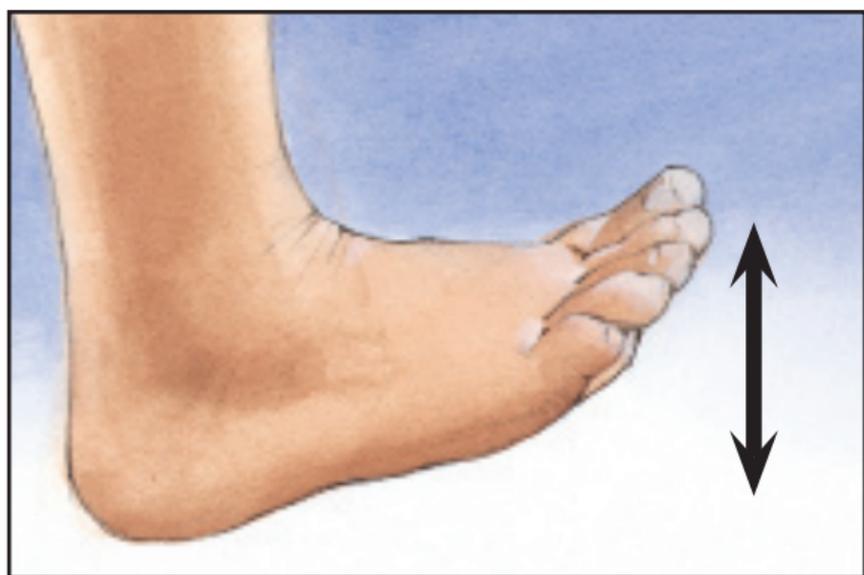
After about 3 days, soak your ankle in warm water for 30 seconds. Then soak it in cool water for 30 seconds. Go back and forth for 5 minutes. Doing this every 2 hours will help keep the swelling down.

Exercises

After about 2 to 3 weeks, you may be given exercises to strengthen the ligaments and muscles in the ankle. Doing these exercises will help prevent another ankle sprain. Exercises may include standing on your toes and then on your heels and doing ankle curls.

Ankle Curls

- Sit on the edge of a sturdy table or lie on your back.
- Pull your toes toward you. Then point them away from you. Repeat for 2 to 3 minutes.



Preventing Future Problems

To help keep your ankle stable, wear sturdy shoes. You may want to tape your ankle or wear a brace if you play sports. Doing the exercise below helps strengthen the muscles and ligaments around your ankle. It also gives you better balance.

Balancing Exercise

- Stand up straight. With your eyes open, balance on the leg with the injured ankle. Lift the other foot off the ground. Hold for 1 to 2 minutes. Then lower your foot.
- When you are able, repeat the first step with your eyes closed.
- Do this 4 times a day.



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