What is an ankle sprain?

Ankle sprains happen to people of all ages. They occur when you ‘roll your ankle’, which over-stretches the ligaments (the fibrous bands that hold the ankle together).

What are the symptoms?

When ligaments are damaged, there is pain, swelling and sometimes bruising. Too much swelling can slow the Healing process. Pain is usually worst in the first two to three days.

Treatment

You may require an x-ray to determine if you have a broken bone (fracture).

Significant injuries may require an ankle brace, or even a plaster cast to allow ligaments to heal properly.

Some people who have repeated ankle sprains may need surgery to stabilize the weakened ligaments.

If you have pain, medications such as paracetamol, codeine (or a combination of both) may help. Anti-inflammatory medications can also help to reduce the swelling and pain. Ask your health-care professional what is best for you.

Prevention

There are simple measures you can take to reduce the risk of an ankle sprain.

- Warm up before exercise.
- Wear supportive shoes.
- If you have previously injured your ankle, you may need to tape or brace your ankle for sport. Speak to your physiotherapist for further information.

First aid for sprains

The initial treatment (first 72 hours) for ankle sprains is based on the ‘RICE’ principles: Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

Rest

Avoid activities that cause pain. If you are unable to put weight on your leg comfortably, use crutches.

Ice

Wrap ice cubes in a damp towel, use frozen peas or a sports ice pack in a towel. Apply to the injured area for 15-20 minutes every one to two hours while you are awake. Never apply ice directly to the skin.

Compression

Apply a firm bandage from the toes to above the ankle. Ensure the bandage does not increase your pain or restrict blood flow to your toes.

Elevation

When resting, raise your foot so it is above the level of your heart.

Avoid ‘HARM’ – Heat, Alcohol, Re-injury and Massage. In the first 48-72 hours, avoid:

Heat

Increases blood flow and swelling.

Alcohol

Increases blood flow and swelling, and can make you less aware of aggravating your injury.

Reinjury

Protect your joint until it has healed adequately.

Massage

Promotes blood flow and swelling. Massage can increase damage if begun too early.
Emergency Department Patient Information
ANKLE SPRAIN

What to expect
Most people fully recover in one to six weeks. If you are no better after a week, see your local doctor or physiotherapist. For more significant injuries, a physiotherapist can provide assistance with healing and rehabilitation. As the pain settles down after the first few days, gradually increase your level of activity.

Seeking help
Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on 9508 1500 at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor’s fee will be bulk-billed.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).

See your local doctor or return to Cabrini ED if you have not improved at all after a week, especially if you are still unable to put weight on your leg.

Exercises
It is important to maintain flexibility and strength as you recover. Progress down the list of exercises as you are able. Perform each exercise three times, twice a day.

Exercise 1. Using a towel, pull your toes back as far as comfortable, and hold for 30 seconds

Exercise 2. Keeping your foot flat on the ground, slide it back under the chair and hold for 30 seconds.

Exercise 3. Keeping your foot flat on the ground, bend your knee towards the wall and hold for 30 seconds.

Exercise 4. Rise up and down on your toes as many times as you can in a row. Do this with just the injured leg when you can. To make it harder still, do this exercise on a step with your heels off the edge.

Want to know more?
- Contact Cabrini ED on 9508 1500
- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit a physiotherapist, chiropractor or osteopath
- Visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Notes:


Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.