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ANKLE SPRAINS

An ankle sprain is a torn ligament or ligaments that hold the bones together.

The good news about ankle sprains is that they heal while you use them so feel free to start bearing weight and gradually return to normal activity based on how the ankle feels. Surgical repair is not needed.

The bad news is that the symptoms of swelling, pain and stiffness are sometimes severe at first and may last many months; it is not uncommon to have pain and stiffness in the morning for a few months after the injury. The bruising may spread out even to the toes but will resolve gradually with time.

If you have sprained your ankle, use the R.I.C.E. Method. R.I.C.E. stands for Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation.

REST

Start putting weight on the injured ankle gradually once it is reasonably comfortable. For the first few days to a week, if it hurts, don't do it. You may need to use crutches initially. After the first week don't baby the ankle too much or there may be excessive atrophy, stiffness and weakness.

ICE

Apply an ice or a cold pack to the injured area for 20 minutes every hour for the first 72 hours. After that, apply ice for 15 or 20 minutes three times a day until all the swelling and pain is gone. Always put a damp cloth between any type of cold pack and the skin; this improves the result and protects the skin.

COMPRESSION

Wrap your ankle comfortably in an Ace bandage for the first 48 to 72 hours; start wrapping at the base of the toes then go above the ankle making sure that it isn't tighter above the ankle than at the toes. If you were given an elastic wrap in the podiatry clinic, use that during the day until the swelling is resolved completely. It can be used under a CAM walker as well as in a lace-up shoe.

ELEVATION

If you have severe swelling you need to elevate your ankle above your heart for most of the day. This allows the fluid from the damaged tissues that are causing the swelling to drain back into your circulation. Remember to keep your knee bent and recline your back so you don't need to elevate the foot so high.

In addition, to relieve pain and reduce inflammation, you might take aspirin or over-the-counter ibuprofen. However, do not give aspirin to children or teens under the age of 20. Take 400 to 600 mg of ibuprofen every 8 hours for 7-10 days, then as needed.

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PHYSICAL THERAPY

The majority of ankle sprain patients do not need to visit a physical therapist; a home therapy program consists of gradual weight bearing as tolerated, calf stretching for 10 minutes 3 times per day, ice and compression therapy, and eventually balance exercises. I recommend that you stand on one foot and slowly raise up on the toes, repeating this until the muscles fatigue - 3 sets to fatigue separated by 30-60 seconds of rest are usually sufficient. You may have to steady yourself on a counter or wall initially but eventually you'll be able to balance yourself without assistance.

An excellent way to do range of motion exercises is to write the alphabet with your foot without moving your knee. Pointing your big toe, make letters about six inches tall. Repeat the whole alphabet about five times a day. Take your time and resume your regular activities gradually. Be particularly careful about walking on uneven surfaces, quick side-to-side movements, running, or jumping.