

About sprained ankle

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What does a sprained ankle mean?

A sprained ankle is a common injury and occurs when the foot or ankle is forced inwards or outwards past its normal range of motion. This may result in some of the ligaments, which surround and support the ankle, being stretched or torn. There will be tenderness around the injury and pain will be made worse by movements and walking. It may take from six weeks to three months to fully recover.

What to expect

For the first and second week, you may have pain when you walk. It is normal for the ankle to swell up either immediately or later. Bruising may appear after a few days. The swelling and bruising may last several weeks. This is normal and nothing to worry about. If you are unable to put any weight on your ankle, you will be given crutches.

How do I help the ankle sprain to heal?

It is very important to initially rest the ankle; using ice to reduce the swelling and elevating the ankle above your hip. If pain allows, you can put weight on the foot and try to walk normally as soon as the severe pain has eased, as this helps with healing. At first, the tissues will feel very tight; this will ease as the swelling reduces. You will also find it more painful first thing in the morning and after resting the ankle for a long time.

How can I reduce the swelling?

When you are not on your feet, you should sit with your feet up on a cushion, so that the ankle is higher than the hip. This allows the swelling to drain away. Over the first two to three days, place an ice pack or a bag of frozen peas on the ankle for 10–15 minutes, four times a day. Before doing this, cover the ankle with a damp cloth or tea towel so that you do not burn the skin.

Will exercises help?

Yes. The muscles and ligaments around the ankle need to be strengthened after an injury. You also need to re-stimulate the nerves that co-ordinate balance to avoid injuring the ankle again. However, healing takes time and returning to your normal levels of physical activity too early may lead to a prolonged healing time and chronic instability of the joint. Please follow the exercises below or your therapist's advice.

Why didn't I have an x-ray?

Clinical research on thousands of patients has shown which findings on examination, safely exclude a broken bone. If x-rays were not ordered for you, this is because the findings of your examination fell into this category.

Exercises

1. As soon as the severe pain has eased, normally after 24-48 hours, you should do the following **ankle exercises four times a day for two minutes each**. Carry on with them until the ankle movement has returned to normal. This may take several weeks.

While sitting on a comfortable chair with the ankle elevated.

- Move your foot up and down 20 times
- Turn your foot inward and outwards in a twisting motion 20 times
- Make 20 circles with your foot in each direction

2. As soon as the symptoms allow and the pain has settled, you should do the following **balance exercise four times a day for a further week**.

Stand on your injured foot, take the weight off the non-injured foot, hold the knee slightly bent and try to keep your balance for 30 seconds.

3. Once the ankle feels strong during the balance exercises, you can gradually start to build up other types of weight-bearing activity. In the meantime, try non-weightbearing activity such as swimming.

Follow up

You are advised to come back to the Emergency Department if:

- Your pain or ability to walk suddenly becomes worse
- Your ankle does not seem to be making any improvement

Further information

If you have any other concerns about your ankle, please contact your GP or the Emergency Department on **01271 322480**.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

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Tel: 01271 313970 / email: ndht.contactus@nhs.net