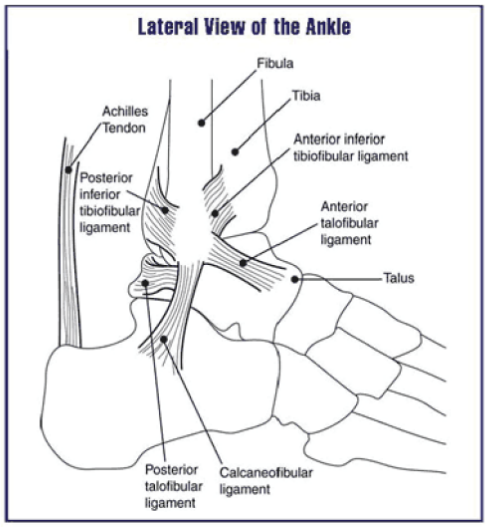
Ankle Sprain

Understanding ankle sprains

Ankle sprains are common and can be debilitating. What you do in the next few days can significantly improve the outcome for your ankle.



Most ankle sprains happen when a person twists or rolls over on their foot. This can cause over-stretching or tearing of one or more of the ligaments in the foot/ankle area. These ligaments are the strong bands of tissue that connect bone to bone and keep the joints stable.

Treatment for most ankle sprains varies depending on impairment, severity and the individual patient. Significant injuries may require an ankle brace or, rarely, a cast or boot.

The first 48 hours

- **Rest** – from weight bearing but start trying to move your ankle straight away. Use crutches to take weight off your ankle if you are having trouble walking.
- **Ice** – apply to the injured area for 15minutes every 2 hours. Use a damp cloth layer, such as a towel, between the ice and your skin. Commercially available ice packs work well as they mould to your skin.
- **Compression** – using a compression bandage/stocking during the day may help with discomfort.
- **Elevation** – raise your ankle above the level of your heart to minimise swelling. The best position is lying down with your foot on some pillows. Hanging the ankle will do the most harm.
- **Avoid 'HARM'** – Heat, Alcohol, Running / sport and Massage.

Know the facts

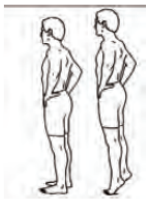
1. Trying to walk normally and not limping helps your recovery, even while using crutches.
2. Elevation of your ankle above heart height reduces swelling and should continue after the initial 48 hours if swelling is present.
3. Using your ankle while it is supported (e.g. strapped) speeds your rate of recovery and return to normal activities.
4. Exercises to strengthen your muscles and ligaments and increase your flexibility, balance and coordination, are important as they help you recover faster and prevent further injuries.

Exercises to try

Strengthening:



Press outer border of foot onto ball or rolled pillow against wall. Hold for 5 seconds, then release. Repeat 5 times.



Rise up on the balls of your feet. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times.

Balance:



Initially, balance with one foot in front of the other with the injured ankle at the front (see picture on the left).

When you can hold this position steadily for 10 seconds, move the injured leg to the back and repeat.



Stand on your injured leg with your eyes open. When you can hold your balance for 10 seconds close your eyes. Keep trying to increase the length of time you can balance.

Ankle Pump:

With the legs elevated, gently flex and extend the injured ankle.





Range of motion:



Place the injured foot in front with the toe against the wall. Bend the front knee and try and touch it to the wall without taking your heel off the ground. Hold for 5 seconds, then release. Repeat 5 times.

Follow up treatment

- Physiotherapy follow up may speed up your return to work and sport.
- You should seek medical advice if you have worsening pain or pain that is not resolving with medications.