

Hospital Authority Health Guide

Ankle Sprain

(1) Causes

- An ankle sprain is caused by a stretch or tear (complete or partial) of one or more of the ligaments that stabilize the ankle. When a joint is over stretched or suddenly twisted exceeding the normal range of motion, it will cause a sprain leading to swelling, pain and bruising of the joint.

(2) Symptoms

- Pain : sharp pain is felt at the injured site, especially during movements or under weight-bearing.
- Swelling and bruising : breaking of tiny blood vessels i.e. blood capillaries at the injured site will lead to redness, swelling and local bruising.

(3) Pain Relieving

- Painkillers may be taken as prescribed when needed.

(4) Care Instructions

(A) Rest the injured limb to avoid further injury and facilitate recovery

- Restrict activities to rest the injured limb for the first 48 hours after the injury.
- Gradually resume activities after 48 hours of injury with the activity level adjusted depending on condition of the injured ankle and should stop if pain is felt.
- Follow medical advice on walking and weight-bearing.

(B) Elevate the injured limb to reduce swelling

- Elevate the injured limb and place it comfortably after the injury. Use 1-2 pillows to elevate the injured limb when sitting or lying down for better lymphatic circulation to reduce swelling.

(C) Apply an ice pack to reduce swelling and pain

- Apply ice to the injured limb if it is red, swollen and painful during the first 2 days after the injury.
- Put ice in a plastic bag and wrap it with a towel. Apply it to the injured site and do not put ice directly on the skin.
- Apply ice every 2-4 hours, 15-20 minutes each time.

(D) Apply a bandage to immobilize and support the injured limb to promote comfort, minimize swelling and prevent further injury

Methods : Elastic compression stockings or elastic bandages

1. Elastic stockings : position the injured area in the middle of the double-layered sock with the tips of the toes exposed for easy observation of blood circulation. Use warm water (about 40 °C) and cleaning agent but not bleach to clean the sock. Let it dry on a flat surface. Elastic stockings are available in sportswear shops.
2. Follow the instructions below on use of elastic bandages which are available in medical supplies shops or pharmacies.



Caution : when applying a bandage, check regularly to ensure that it is not too tight to cause numbness and restriction of blood circulation or too loose and not having the compression effect.

Remove the bandage:

- If there is numbness or tingling
- If pain increases
- When swelling has resolved
- Before sleeping

(5) Signs for Alert

- Generally, it may need 2-3 weeks for the swelling and pain of the injured limb to subside. Go to an Accident & Emergency Department or your family doctor for medical advice if:
 - condition is getting worse, e.g. skin of the affected limb turns pale, feeling of numbness, tingling or burning.
 - Mobility and activity level are decreased and restricted with increased pain after a few days.

Prepared by Coordinating Committee in Accident & Emergency
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