

Ankle Sprains

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Ankle sprains are injuries to the tough, rope-like fibers called ligaments that connect bone to bone. If you have a severe sprain, your symptoms may be very similar to those you would have with a broken bone. Sprains are ranked by degrees based on what has been damaged.

A first-degree ankle sprain stretches the ligaments but does not tear them.

Mild to moderate swelling and pain

A second-degree ankle sprain partially tears the ligaments.

A stable joint that does not feel loose or wobbly.

Moderate to severe pain and swelling

Bruising with Mild to moderate instability.

A third-degree

Mild to severe pain – the pain is sometimes less than in a partial tear

Severe swelling and bruising

An unstable joint that feels wobbly or loose.

ankle sprain completely tears the ligaments.

Treatment:

- Ice and elevate the ankle as often as you can
- Take anti-inflammatory medications (prescription or over-the-counter) to control pain and decrease swelling
- For severe sprains a boot can help with healing; wear it day and night for 10 days except when icing
- Mild to moderate sprains usually require a brace; wear when walking
- Discontinue crutches as you become more comfortable with walking in the boot or brace

What to Expect:

Swelling and bruising are to be expected, but will decrease the more your ankle is elevated. Bruising will appear to move around to different areas of the foot and toes. If you are at work, prop your leg in a chair if possible. While at home, elevate it on at least four to five pillows, keeping your ankle above your heart level. Physical therapy is sometimes ordered for patients with a severe sprain.

Will I Need Surgery for Ligament Tear?

Fortunately even ligament tears will usually heal without surgery. In these cases it is important to wear the boot to allow healing to occur. If the ankle continues to feel loose and give-way then ligament repair can be performed.

Exercises to help Ankle Stability and Flexibility

You may begin these within one or two days after a first-degree sprain, and five to seven days after a second- or third-degree sprain. Follow the instructions carefully and slowly work up to completing the indicated number of sessions and exercises each day. Begin Ankle Circles and Alphabet within one or two days after a first-degree sprain, and five to seven days after a second- or third-degree sprain. Once the mobility improves and pain and swelling decrease then begin strengthening. The balance exercises are performed last.

