

Patient Information Sheet - Information about an Ankle Sprain

The aim of this leaflet is to give you some understanding of the problems you have with your ankle and to provide some advice on how to manage this. It should be used along with information you may be given by your healthcare professional.

What is an ankle sprain?

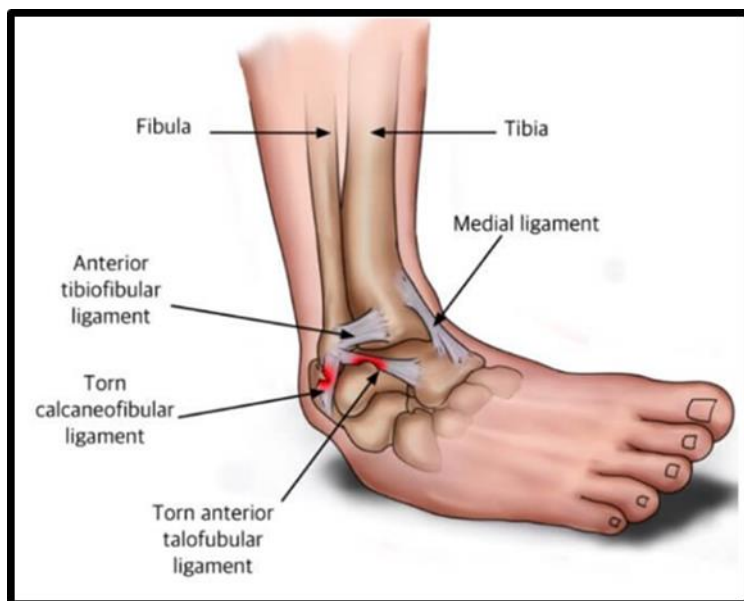


Figure 1: Diagram of a sprained ankle

A sprained ankle is a common injury and can be caused by the overstretching of a ligament. Ligaments are strong tissues around joints which attach bones together and give support to joints. The outlook for ankle sprains is usually good, and most people will be able to get back to normal activities within 6 to 8 weeks.

What are the possible symptoms?

- Pain
 - Swelling
 - Bruising which can extend to the toes and the calf
 - You may find it difficult taking weight through the leg
 - You may be unable to move your ankle normally
- Possible causes of an ankle sprain?
- Going over your ankle with slips, trips and falls

- Wearing unsuitable footwear e.g. flip flops, high heels, or sandals which don't support the feet
- Weakness in the muscles of your feet or legs
- Problems with the position of your feet

What tests may be done?

In the majority of cases, you do not need an x ray or any other tests to confirm what is wrong. The main way to diagnose this problem is through what you tell us and examining your ankle. However if you are unable to take your full body weight on the injured leg when standing then you may need an x ray to rule out a fracture.

What can you do to help the pain in your ankle?

- Follow the advice from your community pharmacist or other healthcare professional about taking medication. It is important to take medication regularly.
- Wearing supportive lace up shoes or boots can help.
- Stop activities which increase your symptoms especially in the first 24 hours. Try to walk as normally as possible
- Only apply an ice pack if wrapped in a damp towel and only for around 5 – 10 minutes. Please check your skin regularly as ice can burn.
- Wear a support such as a tubular compression bandage but only wear this during the day.
- When sitting keep your foot elevated (raised) higher than the level of your hip to help reduce swelling. Gradually over the first week you should be able to get all your weight onto your leg and walk normally.

What else can be done?

The outlook for sprains is usually good, gradually you should be able to get all your weight comfortably on your leg and walk normally. Most people should be able to get back to normal activities within 6 – 8 weeks. Healing time depends on how severe the injury is and any other medical problems you may have.

If you do not see any sign of improvement after 6 - 8 weeks of following the advice and exercises in this leaflet, please get referred to a Podiatrist who can assess your foot and potentially recommend further treatment.

Exercises for ankle sprains

1. Peroneal Tendon strengthening exercises.

The peroneal muscles generally act to plantar flex your foot, in other words they bend your foot down at the ankle. At the same time, they also cause your foot to turn outwards. Any deficiency in the strength of these muscles can lead to instability in the ankle, and a tendency to ankle sprains.

Sit on a chair, next to a large, heavy item of furniture. Loop a towel, belt or therapy band around the furniture, i.e. around a sofa or table leg.



Figure 2: Peroneal Tendon strengthening exercises

Now, keeping your heel on the floor to act as a pivot, slowly turn your foot outwards, against the resistance of the therapy band, and at the same time bend your foot upwards.

Please ensure that you only rotate your foot outwards and not your lower leg. Your knees should remain stationary.

If no resistance is felt, move your chair slightly further away from the furniture the band is attached to.

Once your foot has pivoted around as far as it can go, hold for 2 seconds then slowly allow your foot to pivot back to its starting position. Repeat this process several times.

Repeat for the other leg (you will need to either turn your chair around or use another piece of furniture to exercise the other leg).

STOP THE STRENGTHENING EXERCISE IF YOU START TO EXPERIENCE PAIN

Balancing exercises

Stand on your injured leg and balance for 30 seconds. As your balance improves, to make this more challenging, close your eyes while standing on one leg. It may be that initially, you need to lightly touch a stable surface with fingertips to assist. Progress to standing on one leg on an uneven surface, for example, a cushion or a wobble board.



Figure 3: Balancing exercise