



# Student Health Center

## UNC Wilmington

### INSTRUCTION SHEET: ANKLE FRACTURE (NONDISPLACED)

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a fracture (break) of your ankle. As with any broken bone, the injury is serious, and proper treatment is essential. Fortunately, the parts of the broken bone are not out of place (displaced); therefore, healing should be easier.

Swelling and pain in the ankle occur with a fracture; the amount of each varies with individual patients. Similarly, the amount of time you will be unable to walk on your ankle varies.

This type of break is most often treated with a cast. Initially, though, a soft wrap and crutches are adequate treatment. The ankle will swell during the first 24 hours, and there is less chance of a cast becoming too tight if the cast is applied a day after the fracture. Crutches are necessary to avoid weight-bearing (walking and standing) on the ankle.

#### MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR ANKLE FRACTURE:

- 1- Put the ankle to complete rest! Use crutches. Do not bear any weight: Stay off the ankle until your orthopedic (bone) doctor tells you it is OK to bear weight.
- 2- A soft wrap helps support the ankle and lessen swelling, especially during the initial 48 hours. If the wrap feels too tight, loosen it.
- 3- Elevating the ankle reduces swelling, especially in the initial 48 hours after injury. Keep the ankle up on pillows, above the level of the heart. Let gravity work to reduce swelling.
- 4- Apply cold packs to the ankle off-and-on for the initial 48 hours after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort and minimize additional swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the ankle, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of towels between the cold pack and ankle. The soft wrap can be removed when you apply cold.
- 5- Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with a broken ankle. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
- 6- The provider may prescribe stronger pain medication. Take the prescription medicine only if needed; do not take the medication and perform dangerous activities such as driving a car or operating machinery.
- 7- Make a prompt follow-up appointment as directed. If you make an appointment with an orthopedic (bone) doctor, be sure to tell the office you have a broken ankle and need a “work-in” appointment in the next one or two days. Pick up your X-rays and take them to your appointment. The orthopedic doctor can follow the progress of healing, help minimize the possibility of long-term ankle problems, and assist you in scheduling a return to normal activities.
- 8- If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem with the ankle, return to the Student Health Center promptly.