



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: ANKLE SPRAIN

Treatment: Crutches and Soft Wrap

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a sprain of your ankle. A sprain is a stretching or tear in the ligaments and tendons (rope-like bands holding bones and muscles in place) of a joint.

Despite the fact that no break or dislocation of the bones was seen, a sprain is a significant injury, and should be treated, not ignored. Also, a (hidden) break could still be present, and proper treatment of a sprain also treats a hidden hairline fracture.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR SPRAIN:

- 1- Above all, put the ankle to rest! Resting the ankle not only decreases pain, it also helps heal the ankle more quickly. Use crutches. Do not walk or stand on the injured leg for at least two days. After two days, start gradual weight-bearing. If the ankle hurts, back off from bearing weight. If the ankle is improving, gradually ease back into normal walking.
- 2- A soft wrap helps support the ankle and minimize swelling. If the wrap feels too tight, loosen it.
- 3- Elevating the ankle is helpful to reduce swelling, especially in the initial two days after injury. Keep the ankle up on pillows, above the level of the heart. Let gravity work to decrease swelling.
- 4- Apply cold to the ankle off-and-on for the first two days after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort and minimize swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the ankle, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of towel between the cold pack and ankle.
- 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- After two days, apply heat in the form of warm soaks. Moist heat increases circulation in the ankle tissues, promoting healing.
- 7- If you are not showing good, steady improvement over the next three to five days, make a prompt appointment as directed. Sometimes fractures are hard to see on initial X-rays; repeat exam and X-rays may be necessary. Take the initial X-rays to your appointment (pick up your X-rays at the Student Health Center if you make an appointment elsewhere).
- 8- If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor promptly.
- 9- Realize that once an ankle is sprained, it will be prone to further sprains. High-top shoes or a proper ankle wrap can help protect the ankle during future sports activities. Remember, though, allow at least two weeks for the ankle to heal before you attempt *any* sports (longer if the activity causes any ankle discomfort).