



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: KNEE SPRAIN

Treatment: Crutches & Immobilizer/Wrap

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a sprain of your knee. 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 to the joint, and should be treated, not ignored. Treatment can help prevent long-term problems with the knee.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR SPRAIN:

- 1- Above all, put the knee to rest! Resting the knee not only decreases pain, it also helps heal the knee more quickly. Use crutches. Do not bear weight. Stay off the knee altogether for at least two days. After two days, start gradual weight-bearing with the knee immobilizer. If the knee hurts, back off from weight-bearing. If the knee is improving, gradually ease back into a normal amount of walking.
- 2- The knee immobilizer/wrap should be worn whenever you are awake. Even when you are using crutches the first few days, the knee immobilizer/wrap helps support the knee. When you begin walking without crutches, the immobilizer/wrap braces the knee and helps prevent further injury.
- 3- Elevating the knee is helpful to reduce swelling, especially in the first 48 hours after injury. Keep the knee up on pillows, above the level of the heart. Let gravity work to reduce the swelling.
- 4- Apply cold to the knee off-and-on for the first 48 hours after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort and prevent additional swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the knee, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of towel between the cold pack and knee.
- 5- After 48 hours, apply heat in the form of warm soaks. Moist heat increases circulation in the knee tissues, promoting healing.
- 6- Make a prompt appointment with your personal/referral doctor. Sometimes breaks are difficult to see on initial X-rays; repeat exam and X-rays may be necessary. Take the initial X-rays to your appointment (pick them up prior to your appointment).
- 7- If you are having severe pain or an unusual problem, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor promptly.
- 8- Realize that once a knee is sprained, it may be prone to further injury. Allow the knee to fully heal before you attempt any sports. Avoid contact sports long-term if possible.