



Information for patients, relatives and carers

Sprained Ankle - Advice and Exercise

Getting back to normal activity after injury requires:

- the pain and swelling to settle
- the ankle to be mobilised
- strengthening exercises

Principles of treatment:

The principles of treatment are to reduce swelling and therefore help reduce pain:

Rest

- You will not damage the ankle further if you attempt to walk on it
- Always try to walk normally by putting your heel down first
- Gradually increase your activity as the pain and swelling subside
- Gentle ankle movements performed within the limits of discomfort must be practised frequently to prevent stiffness and stimulate healing

Ice

- Applying an ice pack (or a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a tea towel) as soon as possible after the injury can help to reduce pain and swelling and therefore makes movement easier
- Apply an ice pack for the first 48 hours after the injury, for up to 20 minutes every two to three hours. It is important to avoid direct contact between the ice pack and the skin
- When applying ice, it is important to elevate the area as this will further reduce swelling

Elevation

For the first 48 hours the ankle should be elevated above waist height whenever it is not being gently exercised. This can include sleeping with the foot raised on a pillow or with a support placed under the mattress.

Pain

Over the counter paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medication (ibuprofen) is often helpful but is not suitable for all patients e.g. those with peptic ulcers or asthma. Follow the instructions on the packet and/or seek advice from a community pharmacist if necessary.

Prognosis: Adults

Most ankle sprains are mild and significant improvement can be expected within about 10 days with full healing taking about three weeks. In more severe cases full recovery can take several months to occur and in such cases early physiotherapy is often helpful. If you are not experiencing significant improvement within 10 days of injury, then a review by your GP may be advisable to consider possible referral for physiotherapy.

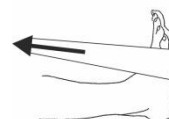
Prognosis: Child and Adolescent

In children in children the rate of healing is usually significantly faster than adults. If your child continues to experience problems 10 days after the injury, they should return to the Emergency Department for further assessment.

Do not return to sport until you are fully fit. The following exercises will help you regain strength and movement:

Exercises 1

Keep your knee straight. Pull your foot upwards as far as possible and then use a belt or towel to apply a slight stretch. Then point your foot downwards and use the belt to give resistance.



Exercise 2

Point your foot down away from your, turning the sole inwards. This will gently stretch the injured ligament.



When you can walk without pain, practice exercises 3 to 5 below.

Exercise 3

Stand on both feet. Bend your knee so they move forwards over your feet. Try not to stick your bottom out. Hold this position for 10 seconds. Do this with just your injured leg as you improve.



Exercise 4

Stand on your injured leg and raise yourself onto tiptoes. Hold this position for five seconds then lower slowly. Repeat until your calf muscle tires.



Exercise 5

Standing on only the injured leg improves and strengthens the muscles needed for balance. If these muscles are strong you are less likely to injure the ankle again.

Practise standing whilst brushing your teeth, washing up etc., until you can manage three minutes without putting the other foot down.

① If you have further concerns about your condition, please contact your GP. If you are not sure what to do, call 111 or get help from 111 online: <https://111.nhs.uk/> [When to use NHS 111 - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/when-to-use-nhs-111/)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services. PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk. An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats: If you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print, Easy Read or audio, please ask the staff who are looking after you.

Date this version published	November 2022
Review Date	August 2025
Document Reference	PIL644 v4, Sprained ankle advice and exercise

© 2022 York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. All Rights reserved.

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk