

SPRAINS & STRAINS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament. A strain is a stretched or torn muscle or tendon. Sprains occur most often in ankles, knees, or fingers, although any joint can be sprained. Strains often occur in the back or hamstring muscles (at the back of the thigh). It is sometimes difficult to know if the injury is a sprain and strain.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain or tenderness in the area of injury; severity varies with the extent of injury.
- Swelling of the affected joint.
- Redness or bruising in the area of injury, either right away, or several hours after injury.
- Loss of normal mobility in the injured joint.

CAUSES

- Strains are often caused by twisting, pulling, or overuse injuries. Pulled muscle is another term used.
- Sprains usually occur as a result of trauma (fall, twisting injury, or automobile accident). The ankle is injured most often because of its normal weakness, its exposed position and the stress it sustains in sports and other activities.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Sports requiring running, jumping, and change of direction.
- High-risk activities such as skateboarding, contact sports, ice and roller skating, mountain biking, skiing and, rock climbing.
- Overweight.
- Trauma.
- Excessive exercise.
- Poor conditioning.
- Poor fitting shoes and high-heeled shoes.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Maintain good level of physical fitness.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- To avoid injury:
 - Wear proper shoes and other protective gear for the sport or activity.
 - Stretch muscles before and after exercise.
 - Strengthen weak muscles with special exercises.
 - Accident-proof your home.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

With treatment and rest, it takes 6 to 8 weeks for recovery. It may take longer if the injury is severe.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Joint may remain unstable.
- Arthritis may develop later on in the joint.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do an exam of the injured area. Questions will be asked about your symptoms and activities that lead to the injury. Tests may include x-rays or other special scans of the injured area.
- Treatment for a sprain or strain will depend on how mild or severe the injury is. It may range from simple self-care, to wearing a cast or brace, to having surgery.
- Use RICE therapy—Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation.
 - Rest and reduce activities as needed. Crutches or a cane may be required to get around.
 - Apply ice. Place ice in a plastic bag and separate it from the skin with a thin towel. Continue the ice treatment for 20 minutes at a time at 2-hour intervals. After 24 hours, continue ice treatment or switch to heat.
 - Compression may be done with elastic wrap. Also, special boots, casts, or splints may be prescribed.
 - Elevate the injured area on a pillow, above the heart level if possible, to help reduce swelling.
- Rehabilitation for a sprain or strain starts after the pain and swelling improve. The goals are to restore complete joint function and a return to full activity levels. You and your health care provider will work out a recovery and exercise plan for your individual needs.

MEDICATIONS

You may take pain relievers such as acetaminophen. If the sprain is severe, a stronger pain reliever may be prescribed. Avoid aspirin, as it may increase the tendency to bleed.

ACTIVITY

You will be taught exercises to do several times a day at home. Physical therapy may be needed. Don't return to previous activity level until advised to do so. You risk a re-injury and chronic joint problems.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has a joint injury.
- Pain, swelling or bruising, increases.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page