Sprained Ankle

Introduction

A sprain occurs when a ligament connecting bones or cartilage is ruptured or torn. Quick and proper care can ensure the road to a safe and moderately quick return to activity without chronic setbacks.

Signs and Symptoms

A first-degree sprain has minimal swelling and discoloration. Ligaments are stretched but not torn.

A second-degree sprain involves partial tearing of the ligament, increased pain, swelling, discoloration, and instability.

A third-degree sprain indicates that the fibers are torn completely, causing gross instability of the ankle as well as discoloration, pain, and much swelling.

Treatment

Mild sprains may be treated at home by following the “RICE” procedure.

Rest: It is important to stay off the ankle as much as possible to allow it to heal.

Ice: The ankle needs to be iced for 15 to 20 minutes using crushed ice cubes or a package of frozen vegetables. A layer of material may be used between the ice and the ankle. Use ice for 20 minutes and then off for 45 minutes until bedtime. Resume ice on the second day as needed.

Compression: Remove ice and wrap ankle with elastic ace bandage.

Elevation: Keep the ankle above the heart when resting at home. Avoid use of the injured ankle by using crutches as soon as possible. Taking time to let your sprained ankle heal will help prevent further pain and injury. You can walk on the ankle as soon as it feels comfortable.

More severe sprains should be seen by a physician or nurse practitioner. You may be referred to a physical therapist where they will implement progressive exercises.

After an injury, your ankle will get stiff. It is important to maintain the full range of motion of your ankle, even with external support. For exercise, rest heel on floor and write the alphabet in the air with your big toe, making the letters as large as you can.

If you can stand on the toes of the injured ankle for 20 seconds and hop on your toes 10 times, you can begin to run.