

HEALTH TOPICS

Ankle Sprain

Overview

An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments of the ankle joint. Ligaments connect bones together and help to stabilize joints. Ankle sprains happen when the foot twists, rolls, or turns beyond its normal motions.

Ankle sprains may be acute or chronic. They are classified by which ligament is injured and the severity of the injury. Healing may take several months.

Signs & Symptoms

- Pain, especially with trying to move the ankle after the injury
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Inability to bear weight on the ankle

Prevention

The best way to prevent ankle sprains is to maintain good strength, muscle balance and flexibility:

- Warm up prior to exercise
- Wear appropriate supportive shoes
- Pay attention to your body -- Slow down or stop when you feel pain or fatigue
- Pay attention to walking, running or work out surfaces

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to reduce the pain of the injury and rehabilitate the ankle as quickly and completely as possible. Treatment may include;

- **Rest:** You may need to rest your ankle, either completely or partially, depending on how seriously your ankle is hurt. In some cases, crutches are necessary.
- **Ice:** Using ice for the first two or three days will help to decrease pain, swelling, bruising and muscle spasms. Use ice on your ankle in 20 minute increments, allowing 20 minutes in between one application session and the next.
- **Compression:** Wrapping your ankle will help to avoid excessive swelling and bruising.
- **Elevation:** Elevating your ankle will help to prevent the swelling from worsening and helps to reduce bruising.
- **Medications:** Ibuprofen or Tylenol is usually best to help with the pain of a sprain.
- Most ankle sprains need only a period of protection and modified activity to heal. The healing process takes about four to six weeks. However, incorporation of protected ankle motions, including ambulation, early in the healing process helps to prevent stiffness and facilitate return to normal functioning of the ankle.

- Elastic tape or ankle braces alone are usually not helpful after the ankle heals, as they will not provide enough support to prevent another injury. A program of ankle strengthening exercises will help to prevent re-injury by making the muscle stronger, providing protection to the ligaments.

How We Can Help

- If you would like to be seen by our medical staff, you can book an appointment [online](#) or by calling our Appointment Desk to [schedule an appointment](#).
- Also, our [Advice Nurse](#) service is free for all UCSB students to discuss health concerns and the options for medical care.
- [Over the counter \(OTC\) products](#) such as ibuprofen and naproxen are available for purchase at our Pharmacy, which is located in the lobby of UCSB Student Health Service.

Recommended Resources

- Ankle sprain (WebMD) <http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/ankle-sprain-overview>
- <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=a00150> (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)
- Ankle sprain (up-to-Date) http://www.uptodate.com/contents/ankle-sprain-the-basics?source=related_link