



Ankle sprain

You came to the emergency department with an ankle injury. The doctor examined you and thinks you have sprained your ankle. If you had an X-ray, it showed no broken bone. This sheet explains how to help it heal.

What is it?

A sprain means the strong bands (ligaments) that hold the ankle bones together have been stretched or torn. It usually happens when the foot rolls inwards. The ankle becomes painful, swollen and often bruised. Most sprains get much better within 2 to 6 weeks. Full strength can take a few months.

Looking after yourself at home

- For the first 2 to 3 days, rest and raise your foot above the level of your hip when sitting.
- Put an ice pack wrapped in a cloth on the ankle for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours.
- Start walking as soon as the pain allows. Gentle use helps healing more than keeping it still.
- Gently move your ankle up and down and in circles several times a day.
- Avoid sport, running and heat on the ankle for the first few days.
- Use crutches or a support only if you were given them, and stop them as walking improves.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may also help, unless your doctor told you not to. Avoid it with a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or pregnancy.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if you still cannot walk normally after 1 to 2 weeks.
- Ask about physiotherapy if the ankle keeps giving way or stays weak.
- Return to sport slowly, only when you can hop and run without pain.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- You cannot put any weight on the foot, or it is getting worse, not better
- The foot becomes cold, pale, blue or numb
- Severe pain that is not eased by painkillers
- Pain, swelling and tenderness in your calf, or sudden breathlessness or chest pain
- The skin over the ankle becomes red, hot and spreading, or you have a fever



Scan to read this sheet on your phone

This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

EM Orbit · Emergency medicine, in one orbit · ankle-sprain-en