

# Caring for your... Mild Ankle Sprain

A Sprain is a twisting injury that causes a stretch or tear of one or more of the strong bands of tissue (called ligaments) that connect the bones at the joint. This leaflet is for mild sprains only. Your health professional will assess the severity of your injury and advise you about the treatment you need.

*Return to see your health professional if:*

- pain or swelling gets worse or there is no improvement after 2-3 days
- you can't stand or walk on your ankle
- you have any worries

The first 2-3 days for pain and swelling

Remember –

## **R.I.C.E.**

**Rest** – reduce the length of time you spend standing and walking as this helps the ankle heal.

**Ice** – Place ice wrapped in a damp towel on the injured ankle – don't put ice directly onto bare skin as it may cause an ice burn. Apply for up to 20 minutes every 2 hours for the first 2-3 days.

**Compression** – Firm (not tight) bandaging helps reduce swelling. Remove the bandage at night.

**Elevation** – Keeping your injured ankle raised on a pillow helps reduce bleeding and swelling.

Avoid

H – heat eg. hot showers, hot packs

A – alcohol

R – running

M – massage (These things may slow your recovery)

Paracetamol can help with pain. Avoid taking aspirin as this can increase bleeding and swelling. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice. The time it takes to recover depends on the type and amount of damage to the ankle. Mild injuries tend to settle within the first few days and you should be able to walk normally within 1-2 weeks.

**Getting back on your feet** Within the first week after the injury, as your pain allows, try and work through the following exercises as advised by your health professional. Exercises help strengthen your ankle, improve balance, flexibility and co-ordination. If pain or swelling gets worse,

stop the exercises and see your health professional. Walking (heel to toe) is OK so long as it doesn't increase pain (try not to limp).

**Exercises** (your health professional will advise you when and how often to do these)

1. With the leg held still, trace the letters of the alphabet (A to Z) with the injured foot.
2. Keeping your leg relaxed, gently turn your ankle/foot in and out as far as possible, avoiding pain.
3. With a pillow against the wall, press the outside of your foot into the pillow.
4. Balance on the injured leg. Start with your eyes open, then with your eyes closed. Keep trying to increase the amount of time you can balance.

**Getting back to activity** Swimming, cycling and walking are activities that can help keep you fit while your ankle heals. If you play sport, your health professional will tell you when it is safe to play sport again. Starting too early or without proper care can increase the chance of another sprain or of having problems later. Your health professional may also recommend specific exercises to help prevent another sprain. It is important that you try to walk as normally as possible and follow the advice of your health professional. If your ankle continues to feel "not right" (unsteady) when you walk on uneven ground or play sports, see your health professional for advice.

## **Tips to prevent another sprain**

- Wear proper, well-fitting shoes
- Always warm-up, cool down and stretch before and after physical activity
- Keep doing the strengthening and balance exercises
- Prepare for sport with pre-season fitness training.