

Ankle Sprains

What is an ankle sprain?

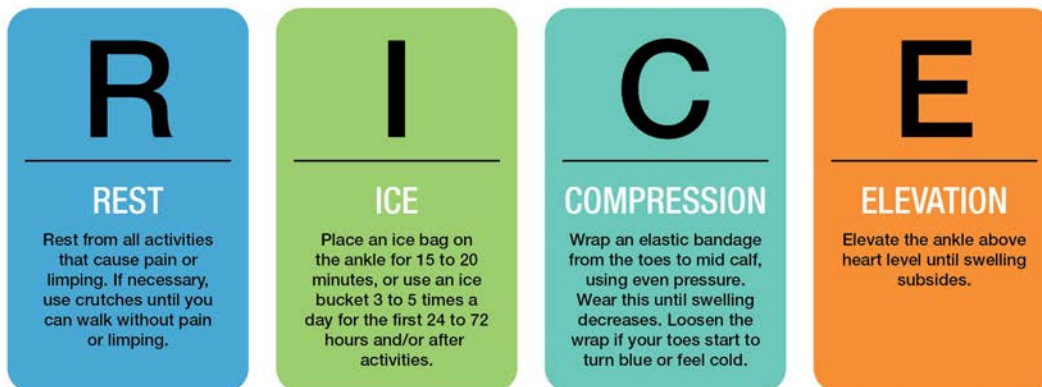
An ankle sprain is an injury or stretching of one of more of the ligaments surrounding the ankle joint that connect the bones of the ankle together. Severe ankle sprains may include tearing of ligaments.

How can I help prevent ankle sprain?

Wear proper, well-fitting shoes when you exercise. Stretch gently and adequately before and after athletic or recreational activities. Avoid sharp turns and quick changes in direction and movement. Consider taping the ankle or wearing a brace for strenuous sports, especially if you have had a previous injury.

Ankle sprain treatment

Initial treatment includes the following easy to remember acronym, RICE:



Sometimes, more severe ankle sprains require having a cast for several weeks. Whether your injury required a cast or not, doing ankle exercises to improve your ankle strength and range of motion and help you return to your normal activity or sports. As soon as you can tolerate pressure on the ball of your foot, begin stretching your ankle using the towel stretch. When this stretch is too easy, try the standing calf stretch and the soleus stretch. You can do 4 when swelling starts decreasing and the other exercises when you can stand on your foot without pain.

1. **Towel Stretch** - Sit on a hard surface with your injured leg stretched out in front of you. Loop a towel around the ball of your foot, and pull the towel toward your body. Be sure to keep your knee straight. Hold this position for thirty seconds and repeat three times.



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2. **Standing Calf Stretch** - Facing a wall, put your hands against the wall at about eye level. Keep the uninjured leg forward and your injured leg back about 12-18 inches behind your uninjured leg. Keep your injured leg straight and your heel on the floor and keep your toes pointed towards the wall. Next, do a slight lunge by bending the knee of the forward leg. Lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in your calf muscle. Hold this position for 30-60 seconds, and repeat 3 times.



3. **Standing Soleus Stretch** - Facing a wall, put your hands against the wall at about eye level. Keep the uninjured leg forward and your injured leg back about 4-6 inches behind your uninjured leg. Keep both heels on the ground and gently bend your knees until you feel a stretch in your calf muscle. Hold this position for 30-60 seconds, and repeat 3 times.



4. **Ankle Alphabets** - You can do this exercise sitting or lying down. Pretend you are writing each of the letters of the alphabet with your foot. This will move your ankle in all directions. The movement should come from your ankle, not from your hip or knee. Do this twice.

5. **Heel Raises** - While standing, on the floor or on a small step balance yourself on both feet and hold onto a wall for balance. Rise up on your toes, hold for five seconds, and then lower yourself back down. Repeat 10 times, and do 3 sets of 10. Once you are comfortable with this, try on one leg. 3 sets of 10.



6. Thera-Band Exercises

A. **Resisted Dorsiflexion** - Sitting with your leg out straight and your foot near a door, wrap the tubing around the ball of your foot. Anchor the other end of the tubing to the door by tying a knot in the tubing, slipping it between the door and the frame, and closing the door, or have a friend or family member hold the band for you. Pull your toes toward your face. Return slowly to the starting position. Repeat 10 times, and do 3 sets of 10.



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B. Resisted Plantar Flexion - Sitting with your leg outstretched, loop the middle section of the tubing around the ball of your foot. Hold the ends of the tubing in both hands. Gently press the ball of your foot down, and point your toes, stretching the THERA-BAND. Return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times, and do 3 sets of 10.



C. Resisted Inversion - Sit with your legs straight out and cross your uninjured leg over your injured ankle. Wrap the tubing around the ball of your injured foot and then loop it around your uninjured foot so that the THERA-BAND is anchored at one end. Hold the other end of the THERA-BAND in your hand. Turn your injured foot inward and upward. This will stretch the tubing. Return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times, and do 3 sets of 10.



D. Resisted Eversion - Sitting with both legs out stretched and the tubing looped around both feet, slowly turn your injured foot upward and outward. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times, and do 3 sets of 10.



7. Single Leg Balance - Stand without any support, and attempt to balance on your injured leg. Begin with your eyes open, and then try to perform the exercise with your eyes closed. Hold the single leg position for thirty seconds. Repeat three times. You may also try this exercise while having someone gently toss a soccer or basketball towards you to catch.



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When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon, you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers at a different rate.

Returning to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon your ankle recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

You may safely return to your sport or activity when, starting from the top of the list and progressing to the end, each of the following is true:

- You have full range of motion in the injured ankle, compared to the uninjured ankle
- You have full strength of the injured ankle compared to the uninjured ankle and are able to complete the above exercises without pain
- You can jog straight ahead without pain or limping
- You can sprint straight ahead without pain or limping
- You can jump on both legs without pain, and you can jump on the injured leg without pain

Return to your sport at about 50% effort, and increase by about 10% each week. If you begin with pain, you may need to rest for a few days before returning to activities.