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# Sprains & Strains

## *How they differ and how to prevent and treat them*

What do you do when you twist an ankle or pull a muscle?

Though sprains and strains are common injuries, not everyone knows how to prevent or treat them. Read on to find out.

### **What are Sprains and Strains?**

A sprain is a stretch or tear of a ligament, which are strong bands of tissue that connect one bone to another at a joint. A strain is damage to muscle fibers and/or tendons, which are cords of tissue that attach the muscle to the bone. Other names for a strain include *torn muscle*, *muscle pull* and *ruptured tendon*.

Sprains are caused by direct or indirect trauma, such as a fall, that knocks a joint out of position. Strains are caused by overusing muscles, often without resting the muscles enough. Some strains are caused by a direct blow or overstretching.

The severity of the injury can be classified by the amount of tissue tearing, joint stability, pain and swelling. The more pain, swelling and instability, the more severe the injury is.

### **Treatment**

Management of both sprains and strains follows the “**PRICE**” principle:

- P** – Protect from further injury
- R** – Rest, or restrict activity
- I** – Apply ice
- C** – Apply compression
- E** – Elevate the injured area

This principle limits the amount of swelling at the injury and improves the healing process. Splints, pads and crutches will protect a joint or muscle from further injury when appropriately used (usually for more severe sprains or strains). Activity restriction (usually for 48-72 hours) will allow the healing process to begin. During the activity restriction, gentle movement of the muscle or joint should be started. Ice should be applied for 15 to 20 minutes every hour to hour and a half. Compression, such as an elastic bandage, should be kept on between icing; you may want to remove the bandage while sleeping, though keeping

it compressed even during the night is best. Elevating the limb will also keep the swelling to a minimum.

### **Prevention**

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has developed the following tips to help reduce your risk of injury:

- Build muscle strength in a conditioning program
- Stretch daily
- Always wear shoes that fit properly
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Warm up before any activity, including walking
- Use protective gear appropriate for the sport or activity



### **Did you know...?**

If you cannot put weight on the limb or it gives way, or you suspect you have more than a mild injury, you should consult with a health care provider.