

A sprain is a tear in the ligaments of the ankle. If you look after your ankle properly, it should get back to normal eventually.

First 1-2 days – R.I.P.E.

Rest – reduce the amount of weight you put through your foot. Do not stop using your ankle completely; you should keep it moving as much as your pain allows.

Ice – Wrap crushed ice or a bag of frozen vegetables in a tea-towel and apply it to the swollen area for 15 minutes every 2-3 hours. **Do not apply ice if you are diabetic, have poor circulation or sensation in your legs, or the skin is broken.** (Do not eat food that has been defrosted then refrozen.)

Pain relief – Take pain killers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to allow you to start moving your ankle

Elevate – When you are sitting or lying down, put something under your leg to keep your ankle above your hip to help the swelling to drain away.

When you start walking you **must** put your heel down first, then your toes, even if you are using crutches. Do not be tempted to walk on tiptoe or on the side of your foot because this may make it take longer for you to recover.

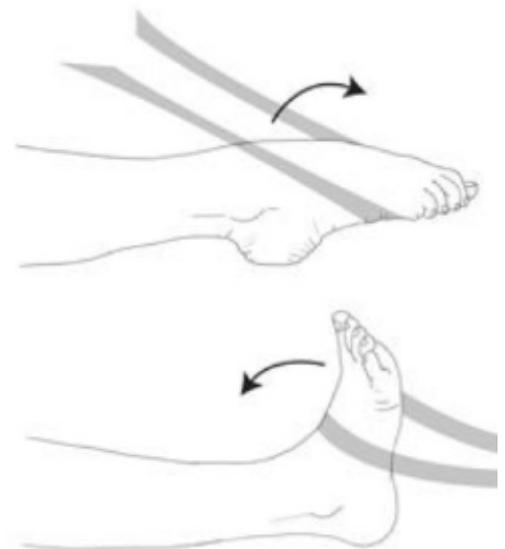
After the first 2 days

Get your ankle moving!

Start with up-and-down and circular movements of the ankle when your leg is elevated. You should do 10 repetitions in each direction 4 times in a row.

As you manage these with less and less pain you should try it while pushing on a long sock or an old pair of tights under the ball of your foot to provide resistance. Also do the opposite exercise with someone else pulling gently down on the sock with it looped over the top of your foot while you pull your foot up.

Over a week or two, gradually increase the tightness on the sock to keep strengthening the ankle. You should do these exercises every 2-3 hours for the first 2 weeks.



After 3-4 days

Once you can take some weight on your injured foot, you should increase the exercise by standing on tiptoes 20-30 times every 3 hours during the day. Hold the position for a few seconds each time. When you first start this exercise, you may have to do it sitting down.

It is normal to have poor balance in the injured ankle to start with because of damage to nerves in the ligaments, so you will have to put more weight through the good ankle. You should try to balance the weight through the injured side as soon as you can.

After 14 days

Try balancing on the injured foot when brushing your teeth in the morning and at night. You should hold on to the sink to start with until the balance improves. You may only manage a few seconds to start with, but this will improve with practise. You can stop this exercise when you can balance for 2 minutes at a time.

These exercises are designed to reduce the chance of being left with a weak ankle that is easy to injure again.

Some people recover from ankle sprains in a few days, but it can take 3 months for the swelling and stiffness to settle and sometimes longer to be able to start sports again. Most people can start swimming much sooner than this.

If you experience increased swelling, altered sensation or a change in colour after the exercises, you should remove the support bandage and elevate the leg. If this does not help, or you have any other problems then please call for advice.

Recovery from ankle sprains is variable but often takes much longer than many people expect. Significant sprains may take several months to fully heal and during this period you may experience some pain and swelling, especially after walking or standing for long periods.

If you are concerned that your ankle injury is not improving **at all** after 7 days, please call the Emergency Department so we can arrange to see you again in our review clinic. You may benefit from referral to the physiotherapy team. In rare circumstances patients may be referred to the orthopaedic team for more specialist follow up.

For more information contact:

- Emergency Department 01535 294481
- NHS 111 111, or 111.nhs.uk
- The NHS website www.nhs.uk

