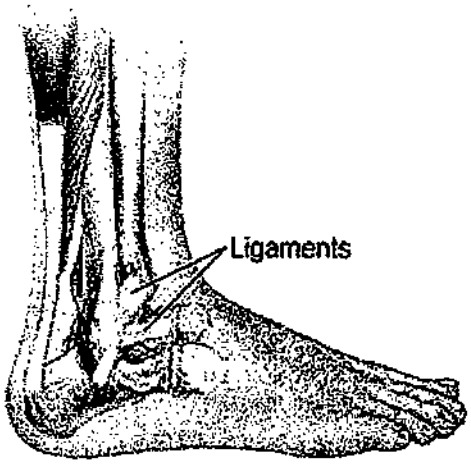
Understanding Ankle Sprain



The ankle is the joint where the leg and foot meet. Bones are held in place by connective tissue called ligaments. When ankle ligaments are stretched to the point of pain and injury, it is called an ankle sprain. A sprain can tear the ligaments. These tears can be very small but still cause pain. Ankle sprains can be mild or severe.

What causes an ankle sprain?

A sprain may occur when you twist your ankle or bend it too far. This can happen when you stumble or fall. Things that can make an ankle sprain more likely include:

- Having had an ankle sprain before
- Playing sports that involve running and jumping. Or playing contact sports such as football or hockey.
- Wearing shoes that don't support your feet and ankles well
- Having ankles with poor strength and flexibility

Symptoms of an ankle sprain

Symptoms may include:

- Pain or soreness in the ankle
- Swelling
- Redness or bruising
- Not being able to walk or put weight on the affected foot
- Reduced range of motion in the ankle
- A popping or tearing feeling at the time the sprain occurs
- An abnormal or dislocated look to the ankle
- Instability or too much range of motion in the ankle

Treatment for an ankle sprain

Treatment focuses on reducing pain and swelling, and avoiding further injury. Treatments may include:

- **Resting the ankle.** Avoid putting weight on it. This may mean using crutches until the sprain heals.
- **Prescription or over-the-counter pain medicines.** These help reduce swelling and pain.
- **Cold packs.** These help reduce pain and swelling.
- **Raising your ankle above your heart.** This helps reduce swelling.
- **Wrapping the ankle with an elastic bandage or ankle brace.** This helps reduce swelling and gives some support to the ankle. In rare cases, you may need a cast or boot.
- **Stretching and other exercises.** These improve flexibility and strength.
- **Heat packs.** These may be recommended before doing ankle exercises.

Possible complications of an ankle sprain

An ankle that has been weakened by a sprain can be more likely to have repeated sprains afterward. Doing exercises to strengthen your ankle and improve balance can reduce your risk for repeated sprains. Other possible complications are long-term (chronic) pain or an ankle that remains unstable.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed
- Pain, numbness, discoloration, or coldness in the foot or toes
- Pain that gets worse
- Symptoms that don't get better, or get worse
- New symptoms

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Treating Ankle Sprains

Treatment will depend on how bad your sprain is. For a severe sprain, healing may take 3 months or more.

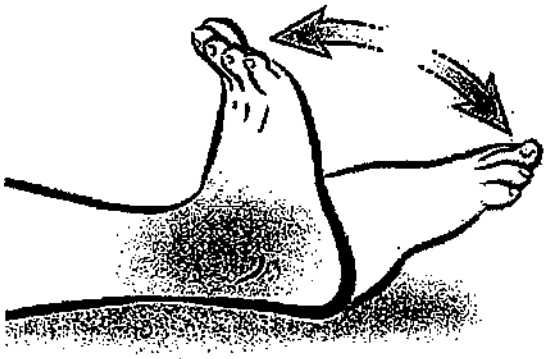
Right after your injury: Use R.I.C.E.

- Rest: At first, keep weight off the ankle as much as you can. You may be given crutches to help you walk without putting weight on the ankle.
- Ice: Put an ice pack on the ankle for 20 minutes. Remove the pack and wait at least 30 minutes. Repeat for up to 3 days. This helps reduce swelling.
- Compression: To reduce swelling and keep the joint stable, you may need to wrap the ankle with an elastic bandage. For more severe sprains, you may need an ankle brace, a boot, or a cast.
- Elevation: To reduce swelling, keep your ankle raised above your heart when you sit or lie down.

Medicine

Your healthcare provider may suggest oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen. This relieves the pain and helps reduce swelling. Be sure to take your medicine as directed.

Exercises



After about 2 to 3 weeks, you may be given exercises to strengthen the ligaments and muscles in the ankle. Doing these exercises will help prevent another ankle sprain. Exercises may include standing on your toes and then on your heels and doing ankle curls.

Ankle curls

- Sit on the edge of a sturdy table or lie on your back.
- Pull your toes toward you. Then point them away from you. Repeat for 2 to 3 minutes.

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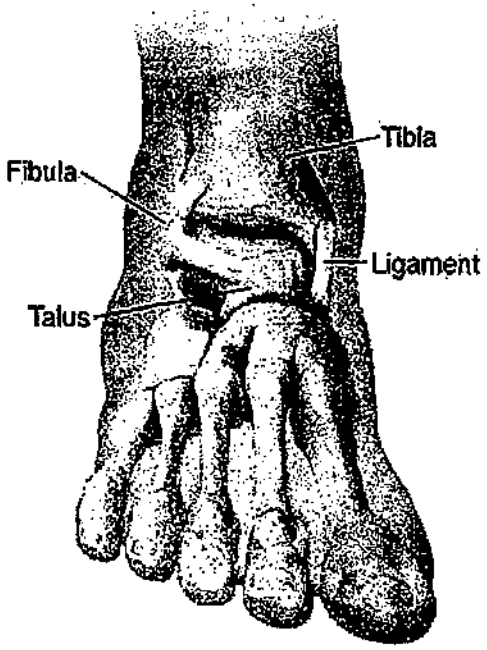
Understanding an Ankle Fracture



The ankle is formed by bones in the lower leg (tibia and fibula) and the bone on top of the foot (talus). When you have a fracture of the ankle, it means that one or more of the bones in the ankle are broken. The bone may be cracked, broken into two or more pieces, or even shattered. The pieces of bone may be lined up or they may have moved out of place. Sometimes, the bone may break through the skin. Nearby ligaments may also be damaged. Depending on how badly the bone is broken, healing may take a few months or longer.

What causes an ankle fracture?

Ankle fractures are often caused from severely twisting or rolling the ankle. They may also be caused from a fall, blow, accident, or sports injury.

Symptoms of an ankle fracture

Symptoms can include pain, swelling, and bruising. If the bone breaks through the skin, bleeding at the site can also occur. The ankle may look crooked, deformed, or bent. Also, it may be hard to move or use the ankle and foot as you would normally.

Treating an ankle fracture

Treatment for an ankle fracture depends on where the bone is broken and how serious the break is. If needed, the bone is put back into place. This may be done with or without surgery. If surgery is needed, the surgeon may use devices such as pins, plates, or screws to hold the bone together. Usually, you will wear a splint, brace, or short leg cast to keep the bone in place and protect it from injury during healing. Other treatments may also be used to help reduce symptoms or regain function. These include:

- **Rest.** You may need to avoid walking or putting any weight on the broken ankle for a period of time. Severe fractures need a longer limit on weight-bearing activities.
- **Cold packs.** Putting an ice pack over the injured area may help reduce swelling and pain.
- **Compression.** An elastic bandage may be wrapped around the ankle to help reduce swelling.
- **Elevation.** Propping up the ankle so that it is above your heart may ease swelling.
- **Pain medicines.** Prescription or over-the-counter pain medicines may help reduce pain and swelling. If needed, stronger pain medicines may be prescribed.
- **Exercises.** Your healthcare provider may give you certain exercises to do at home or with a physical therapist. These help restore strength, flexibility, and range of motion in the ankle and foot.

Possible complications of an ankle fracture

These can include:

- Poor healing of the bone
- Weakness, stiffness, or loss of range of motion in the ankle
- Osteoarthritis in the ankle

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed
- Symptoms that don't get better with treatment, or get worse
- Numbness, tingling, or coldness in your foot or toes
- Toenails that turn blue or grey in color
- A splint, brace, or cast that is damaged or feels too tight or loose
- Unusual redness, warmth, swelling, bleeding, or drainage from any wounds or incision sites
- New symptoms

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