

Musculoskeletal Injury

Sprains and Strains

If you have injured yourself, you may think you have broken (fractured) a bone however you may have a sprain or strain instead.

A sprain is an injury that causes a stretch or a tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong band of tissues that attach bones to each other. A strain is an injury that causes a stretch or tear in a muscle or tendon. Tendons are strong bands of tissue that attach muscles to bones.

If you have injured yourself you may notice swelling, redness and/or bruising. The bruising is caused by blood under the skin and may spread over the area in the following days.

How do I treat Sprains and Strains?



R Rest: At first you should avoid activities that cause pain. This may require you to use crutches or a sling.

I Ice: Apply ice to the injured area for a maximum of 15 minutes out of every half-hour. You can continue icing this way for as long as the area is swollen or sore

C Compression: Using a compression (Tensor) bandage can help reduce swelling and discomfort. It does not however give you extra support to do more activity. It should be snug but not too tight and should only be worn when sitting or lying down.

E Elevate: Elevate the injured part above the level of your heart. This helps reduce swelling and discomfort.

These instructions are not intended to be all-inclusive, and may not cover all possibilities. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your doctor, Telehealth Ontario (866)797-0000, or return to the emergency department.



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Exercise is recommend early (after the first 24-48 hours). Movement of the injured area helps to speed up recovery. This should be done gently, within your limits of pain. At the beginning, this may be as simple as bending the injured part up and down. You may see a physiotherapist to help with early mobilization. Returning to full activity should be done in a graduated, step-by-step manner beginning with light walking and progressing to full range of activities.

What can I take for pain?

For pain relief you may use ibuprofen (Advil®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Your doctor may also provide you with a prescription for a stronger medication if required.

Do I need Crutches?

The nurse who gave you your crutches should show you how to use them properly. Here are some additional pointers and reminders:

- Crutches should rest at the side of your body, not in your armpits
- Your weight should be held on your hands
- You should always lead with the crutches and follow through with the good limb, flat on the ground. Crutches should be positioned not too close or far from the body as it shifts your balance. Take small strides forward to also help with balance.
- Careful when using crutches on the stairs. Instead hold the crutches in one hand and the handrail in the other. Step down with the bad leg and crutches first, then the good leg. When going up the stairs, step up with the good leg and then the bad leg and crutches. “Up with the good—down with the bad.”

Call your family doctor or return to emergency department if:

- If the pain is worsening at any time
- If the pain has not improved after 7-10 days (sometimes a small break can be present, but it cannot be seen on the first day with the initial X-Ray)



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