



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Ankle Sprains

Ankle sprains occur when one or more of the ankle ligaments is stretched or torn. Ligaments are the strong bands that connect the bones of the ankle. A sprain can range from a mild injury involving only stretched ligaments to a serious injury where ligaments or bone chips can be torn away. Generally, you can judge the seriousness of the problem by the ankle's response to home treatment.

Pain and swelling are the most common symptoms of a sprained ankle. The swelling is generally followed in a few days by bruising.

The best way to prevent ankle sprains is by wearing comfortable, well-fitted shoes that provide good ankle support, and making sure that you can always see where you're going. High-heeled shoes are not recommended.

If you think you have sprained your ankle, start the R-I-C-E, or R.I.C.E., treatment immediately. R.I.C.E. stands for Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation. Let's take each one of these in turn but slightly out of order:

### · **Rest.**

Do not walk or put weight on the injured ankle if you can't walk without pain in a proper heel-toe fashion with your toe pointing straight ahead. When it's like this, your ankle needs total rest for one or two days. Use crutches if necessary.

### · **Ice.**

Apply an ice or a cold pack to the injured area for ten minutes every hour for the first 72 hours. After that, apply ice for 15 or 20 minutes three times a day until all the swelling and pain is gone. Always put a damp cloth between any type of cold pack and the skin; this improves the result and protects the skin.

### · **Elevation.**

Keep your leg up so that your ankle is higher than your heart. This allows the fluids from the damaged tissues that are causing the swelling to drain back into your circulation. Place a pillow under your foot when you sleep at night and prop up your foot when you are sitting or applying ice packs during the day.

### · **Compression.**

Wrap your ankle comfortably in an elastic—or Ace—bandage for the first 48 to 72 hours. Before

you do this, put a U-shaped soft pad around the ankle bone to fill in the hollows between it and the heel and the mid-foot. A rolled soft cloth works well; so does a U-shaped pad cut from a diaper or a sanitary pad. After wrapping the pad around the ankle bone, wrap the foot and ankle with an elastic bandage, being sure not to stretch the bandage so tightly that it interferes with blood circulation to the foot.

In addition, to relieve pain and reduce inflammation, you might take aspirin or over-the-counter ibuprofen. However, do not give aspirin to children or teens under the age of 20.

A minor ankle sprain may take between two and four weeks before a young person can return to full activity. More severe sprains take longer. And older folks might need more time still. After the pain has subsided, do not try full activities right away. Do some basic exercises to help speed recovery and prevent reinjury later. These include range of motion exercises and calf stretches. An excellent way to do range of motion exercises is to write the alphabet with your foot without moving your knee. Pointing your big toe, make letters about six inches tall. Repeat the whole alphabet about five times a day. Take your time and resume your regular activities gradually. Be particularly careful about walking on uneven surfaces, quick side-to-side movements, running, or jumping.

You should call your health care professional immediately if your ankle bends in an unusual way after the injury. You should also call if the pain is still intense after two days of home treatment.



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- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
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The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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