

Leaflet 8 Joint Sprain

When you have a joint injury, the ligaments that support the joint and the tendons that move the joint are likely to be overstretched. This causes the tissues to become inflamed.

Depending on the severity of the injury there may be only slight discomfort for a few days or there may be a lot of swelling and heat. If you follow the advice given on this sheet, it will speed up your recovery and minimize future problems.

If your doctor has suggested painkillers it is important that you take them regularly to get the full benefit.

Protection

It is important to use any supports that may have been given to you, such as crutches or slings. It is not necessary to completely avoid moving the injured part, in fact gentle exercise will be beneficial.

Rest

For the first few days after injury, it may help to restrict your normal activities, particularly those involving stress being placed on the injured area or movements that cause or increase pain, such as weight-bearing through the affected part.

Although the injured area should be rested during the early stages, the joints above and below should still be moved. As you start to feel better, gradually move the affected part more and gradually start to take more weight when you walk.

Ice

Use ice to reduce the swelling/bruising/muscle spasm and pain. Apply crushed ice or frozen peas in a damp towel for 10-15 minutes. This can be applied every two hours as necessary. Do not put ice directly onto the skin.

Compression

For the first 72 hours use an elastic bandage or tubigrip to apply compression to the injured area. This compression should be a minimum of six inches above and below the site of injury, making sure that even pressure is felt throughout.

Check the area below the injured site for coldness/pallor which may suggest that the compression is too tight.

Remove the compression whilst lying down.

Do not apply compression if you have any problems with your circulation or if you have had a recent thrombosis.

Elevation

Elevate the injured area above the level of the heart as much as possible for the first 72 hours. Make sure you support nearby joints while doing this by using pillows etc.

Continue the exercises until your symptoms resolve. This may take up to 10 weeks. Only return to sporting activities when you have full movement and good balance.

Consult your GP again if you are continuing to have problems, such as the joint feeling unstable, having balance problems or the same injury reoccurring frequently.