

# Ankle Sprains

Ankle sprains can be a bigger problem than most people think. Far too many people treat their ankle sprains by hobbling around for one to two weeks until their ankle pain goes away and they are able to walk on the injured ankle. The problem is that over half of all people who suffer ankle sprains will report they still have some ankle problems six months to a year after the initial injury. The most common problems reported are pain, swelling, weakness, or instability.

Most people believe that when most or all the pain is gone their ankle is healed. This belief often puts them at the risk of repeated ankle sprains that can result in long-term problems. When the ligaments have been damaged their response time is slowed. Thus, the next time you lose your footing or step wrong, the ankle may not be able to respond fast enough to avoid another ankle sprain or even a more serious injury. To get a better understanding, think of the damaged ligaments as pulling something with a rope that has a lot of slack in it. As you start to pull, the object does not move until you have first taken up the slack and the rope is tight. Taking up this slack takes time. The overly stretched out ligaments are also a bit slower to respond. Thus, the increased risk of repeated injury. Make note, it can take up to 12 to 18 months for the ligaments and connective tissue of the ankle that have been sprained or overly stretched to completely heal.

Repeated ankle sprains are often seen in younger athletes. They often feel their bodies are invincible and go back to their sport as soon as the pain

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regimen.



## Stay Healthy

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is gone and fail to follow through with any treatment or protection. Thus, they often re-sprain the ankle, and each time the ankle becomes increasingly unstable and the risk of another ankle sprain or related injury grows. An unstable ankle not only puts the ankle at risk, but also the knee, hip, or back are at increased risk of injury. The inability of the ankle to respond can translate up the bodies chain, making the joints above take more strain to compensate for the ankles inability to react normally. It is often not surprising to see athletes injure the opposite ankle or leg as it may also be used to compensate for the injured ankle. However, it is far too often that only after the ankle becomes a hindrance to their sport, they then seek out medical help usually from their doctor, physical therapist, or other health care professional. Now they may have to miss part of their sport and go through a longer and unavoidable therapy

They key is treating the ankle right away and staying on a strength program for at least three to six months. This will significantly reduce your risks of repeated injury and allow you to continue enjoying the activities that you enjoy. If you suffer a sprained ankle you should immediately remember "R.I.C.E." R.I.C.E. stands for Rest, Ice, Compression (light bandage/ace wrap), and Elevation. In general, most sprained ankles are not emergencies, but if the ankle is deformed or is bending in an unusual way you should go to the emergency room right away. As a rule use the R.I.C.E. principles and if you are unable to walk normally after two days you should see your physician and get further care. After your ankle is feeling better you should start an exercise program for your ankle to strengthen the muscles and retrain the ankles ability to respond to the twist and turns that are part of everyday life or sports. Athletes or very active individuals should also consider bracing during their sport or times of high activity for three to six months after their initial injury to protect the ankle as it heals.

Get educated, get health smart, and live longer and happier.