



# Ankle and Foot Injury Advice

You have been diagnosed with a sprain (known as a soft tissue injury) to your ankle. A sprain is an injury to a ligament (strong tissues around joints) which attach bones together and give support to joints. When the ankle is forced to bend more than normal this stretches and injures the soft tissues that hold the ankle and/or foot bones in place, causing inflammation, swelling, and bleeding (bruising) around the affected joint.

The main aims of treatment are to keep inflammation, swelling and pain to a minimum, and to be able to use the ankle joint normally again as quickly as possible.

In order to help the natural healing process, please follow the advice below.

Things you should do:	Things you shouldn't do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest for the first 24-48 hours after your injury</li> <li>• Use ice packs (frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do), for 15-20 minutes every 2 hours if you can</li> <li>• Keep your ankle raised (elevated) with your foot higher than your bottom to help prevent/reduce the swelling. We no longer offer bandages for sprains as they don't appear to help your ankle heal any quicker. Some people find them of benefit and they can be bought from pharmacies or good sports shops.</li> <li>• Take pain relief – see advice below - which can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops.</li> <li>• Protect your ankle from further injury, by using a lace-up shoe or boot with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use ice packs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li> <li>○ if you have poor sensation to cold</li> <li>○ if you know you have poor circulation.</li> <li>○ Place ice packs directly onto your skin as they can burn.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Don't leave ice on while asleep</li> <li>• Don't use ice for more than 20 minutes at a time - you won't be helping heal the sprained ankle any faster, and you can cause damage to the tissue</li> </ul> <p>Avoid <b>HARM</b> for 72 hours after injury. That is, avoid the use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H</b>eat, for example, hot baths, saunas, heat packs. Heat encourages blood flow, so, should be avoided when inflammation is developing. However, after about 72 hours, no further inflammation is likely to develop and heat can then be soothing.</li> <li>• <b>A</b>lcohol drinks which can increase bleeding and swelling and decrease healing.</li> <li>• <b>R</b>unning or any other form of exercise which may cause further damage.</li> </ul>

<p>high sides or a support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put something under your mattress or the end of the bed so that your foot is raised at night.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Massage</b> which may increase bleeding and swelling. However as with heat, after about 72 hours, gentle massage may be soothing.</li> </ul>
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Soft tissue injuries can take several weeks to heal completely. Normal walking is usually possible within 2 weeks and your ankle/foot should be back to normal between 6-8 weeks. You will probably find that your ankle will be swollen more in the evenings especially in the first 2 weeks – if this happens elevate it. You can expect your ankle/foot to be painful during this time. It is important that the ankle/foot is not rested for too long as this may delay recovery so see below for flexibility exercises.

## EXERCISES:

**Begin these flexibility exercises as soon as you can** - provided they don't cause excessive pain – as they are designed to mobilise the joints, strengthen your muscles and retain your balance and so improve the range of movement and function of your foot and ankle. All these things are important to prevent further re-injury. The repetitions and sets are a guideline.



**1.** When you are sitting down, move your foot up and down x 20

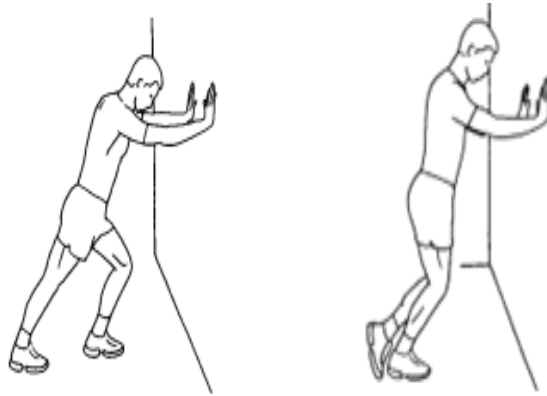
**2.** When sitting down, rotate your ankle clockwise and then anticlockwise.  
x 10 in each direction



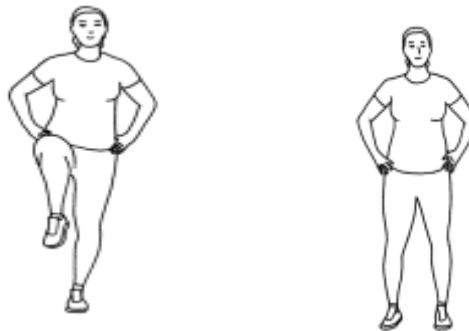
**3.** When sitting down, lift up your heels and then lower them  
x 20



**4.** Stand in a walking position with your injured leg straight behind you and the other leg bent in front of you. Lean forwards and hold a comfortable stretch for 30 seconds relax. Do one set with your back leg straight and the second set with back knee bent. Repeat x 3 of each



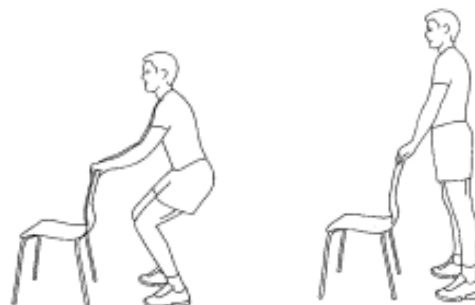
**5.** Stand on one foot then lift & lower your other leg. If you feel wobbly then you may need to hold onto the wall for support. X10



**6.** Heel raises:  
Stand holding onto a supportive surface and lift up onto your toes and then lower. X10



**7.** Stand holding on to a chair and do shallow squats in a pain free range  
X 20



Putting your weight on your injured foot/ankle early has been shown to help sprained ankles heal more quickly- this is why you may not have been given crutches. Only use crutches if you have been told to and don't stand still for long periods. When you walk do so with even strides putting your heel down first, then rolling forwards onto your toe and put as much weight on your foot, as your ankle will let you.

It is ok to gradually return to sport whilst your ankle is healing. You don't have to be pain free, but the pain should be more of a dull ache with residual swelling that settles after 12-24 hours, sharp pain should be avoided. Pace up the impact from walking to walk jog to jog and then running. Non weight bearing exercise like cycling and swimming are great exercise to start back with.

If you are concerned about your progress, or if there is no improvement at all after 4 weeks, we advise you contact your GP or self-refer to your local physiotherapy department. If the pain is severe return to your local MIU department or ED.

Physio self-referral link:

[Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Physiotherapy Service \(wales.nhs.uk\)](https://wales.nhs.uk)



If you are unable to do this electronically you should call 0300 3732539 between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

**If you are at all concerned about your injury, please contact the relevant**

**Emergency Department: Grange University Hospital: 01633 493287**

**Or Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056   Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873  
732073**

**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

No pain relief may be needed if the sprain is mild. However, painkillers such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then.

They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol.

**With all the medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** (like Ibuprofen) can also be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them. Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either. If you have been advised not to take Ibuprofen in the past or are on any blood thinning tablets then avoid Ibuprofen.

You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

**If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact Physiotherapy or your GP or return to the Emergency department / Minor injury unit where you were seen.**

**Reference:** <https://cks.nice.org.uk/sprains-and-strains>

**This document is available in Welsh/  
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**