

# Ankle sprains can be problematic

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Ankle sprains are injuries that result in stretching or tearing of ligament.

A ligament is a strong soft tissue structure located at a joint that helps to stabilize the bones at the joint. At the ankle, there are ligaments on both the inner (medial) and outer (lateral) aspects of the joint, but the lateral ligaments are most often injured.

Ankle sprains can occur after twisting of the ankle. Typically, the ankle will turn inward causing a sprain of the lateral ligaments. Severity of the sprain varies from minor stretching to complete rupture of the ligament.

Pain, swelling and bruising are usually present and placing weight on the injured ankle will aggravate the pain. Symptoms may range from minor to severe.

Immediate treatment consists of rest, ice, compression, and elevation. Usually some type of protection of the ankle in the form of wrapping, bracing or casting is required.

Crutches may also be needed. For more moderate to severe injuries, protection is continued two to three weeks. After a while, the pain and swelling have decreased and rehabilitation of the ankle is initiated.

Rehabilitation after a sprain is equally as important as the protection phase of treatment and can considerably decrease the likelihood of continued or recurrent problems for the ankle.

While minor symptoms may continue for as long as several months after injury, with proper treatment, more than 90 percent of patients will do well after a sprain.

Unfortunately, a small percentage of patients may continue to have significant trouble with their ankle after a sprain.

These problems are typically pain and/or instability. The instability is usually the result of the ligament healing too loose or stretched out.

Giving-out sensations and recurrent sprains are common. Patients with ankle instability who have not improved with rehabilitation will likely require surgical repair of the ligaments.

Persistent pain after and ankle sprain can be caused be several conditions. A common condition is a result of thickened scar tissue that can form in the ankle joint after a sprain. This scar tissue can cause impingement in the ankle creating persistent pain.

Another common cause of persistent pain is injury or damage to the cartilage of

one of the bones of the ankle joint.

These injuries, called osteochondral defects, commonly may not show up on an X-ray for as long as three months after the injury. Both soft tissue impingement and osteochondral defects can be successfully treated with arthroscopic surgery.

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