

Avoiding ankle sprains

It doesn't take much to sprain your ankle. One misstep or slip can prove to be very painful. A sprain occurs when you roll or turn your foot, causing one or more ligaments on the outside of your ankle to stretch or tear. If the sprain is severe, you may feel a pop when the injury takes place.

Signs of a sprain The ankle is the part of your body most prone to sprains, according to the National Institutes of Health. Signs of a sprain may vary, depending on the severity of your injury. But symptoms may include:

- Swelling
- Pain
- Bruising
- Inability to move your ankle joint

You should have a doctor look at your ankle if:

- It is tender when you touch it

A sprain may happen any time you roll or turn your foot.

- The injured area looks crooked or lumpy
- You cannot walk more than four steps without significant pain
- It turns red
- You have injured it before

Prevent sprains While there's always a chance of spraining your ankle, especially when playing sports, there are steps you can take to lower your risk.

- Keep yourself in good physical condition.
- Wear low-heeled shoes.
- Warm up and stretch before physical activity.
- Wear an ankle brace when playing sports.
- If you run, run only on even surfaces.

- Keep your home, yard, and workplace free of clutter.
- Salt or sand icy patches in the winter.

Treating sprains

If you sprain your ankle, your doctor may tell you to treat it with RICE.

Rest: Stay off your feet most of the time and use crutches if necessary.

Ice: Place ice on your ankle for 20-minute periods, four to eight times a day. Use a cold pack, ice bag, or plastic bag filled with crushed ice and wrapped in a towel.

Compression: Wrap your ankle with an elastic bandage. Be sure not to wrap it too tightly. Ask your doctor for wrapping advice.

Elevation: Raise your ankle above the level of your heart for two to three hours a day. Lie on a couch or bed and prop your foot up with pillows.

Use RICE therapy for at least two days after you sprain your ankle. If the sprain does not improve with this treatment, tell your doctor.

If you don't treat your sprained ankle properly, you are more likely to injure it again, or you may have chronic pain.

Sources: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; National Institutes of Health

