

ANKLE SPRAINS

ADVICE FOR PATIENTS



We've all twisted our ankle at one time or another. Whether walking, running, jumping or dancing, it's sometimes unavoidable to roll over on an ankle. They're some of the most common injuries because we all spend so much time on our feet.

Sometimes, though, the problem is severe and longer lasting and that simple twisting or over-stretching action has caused damage to muscles and/or ligaments. This is what is known as a sprain or strain. Spraining your ankle means you've overstretched or torn your ligament. These could be minute tears in the fibres or in more severe cases, be a tear which goes entirely through the tissue. There could also be damage to the muscles, tendons or soft tissue surrounding the joint.

If your sprain's bad, there's a chance you'll feel weakness and if left untreated, it could lead to much longer term conditions which are more difficult to treat than sprains.

The best way to initially (48-72 hours) treat an ankle sprain is with 'POLICE': which stands for Protection. Optimal. Loading. Ice. Compression (i.e. a support or bandage). Elevation. This should help to bring down any associated swelling and help speed up the healing process. Avoid using heat, excessive alcohol and taking anti-inflammatory drugs in the first 72 hours as this can prevent or slow down the healing process. If you're really struggling with pain, swelling and weight bearing the injury could be worse than a sprain and may need a visit to urgent care/A&E for a review/Xray.

DIAGNOSIS & OUTLOOK

On arriving at W5Physio with a suspected ankle sprain we'll carry out an examination of the area to confirm a diagnosis. We'll ask you how you sustained the injury and check your range of motion. We'll look not only at the ankle but also the lower leg and foot, checking for signs of discolouration, bruising and swelling and any areas that are tender to touch.

Diagnosing which ankle ligaments you have injured is important to your rehab and how long it will take to fully recover. It's important to rule out a high ankle ligament sprain as if left unnoticed can lead to prolonged rehab or disability. This injury is usually painful above the ankle bones and may show swelling round the ankle bones like a 'doughnut'.

Signs that you have an ankle sprain include not just pain, but also weakness and often an inability to put weight on the affected leg.

The ankle may feel stiff and as if you can't move it in ways that you normally would. You could even occasionally experience cramps and tightening of the muscles in the area of the injury.

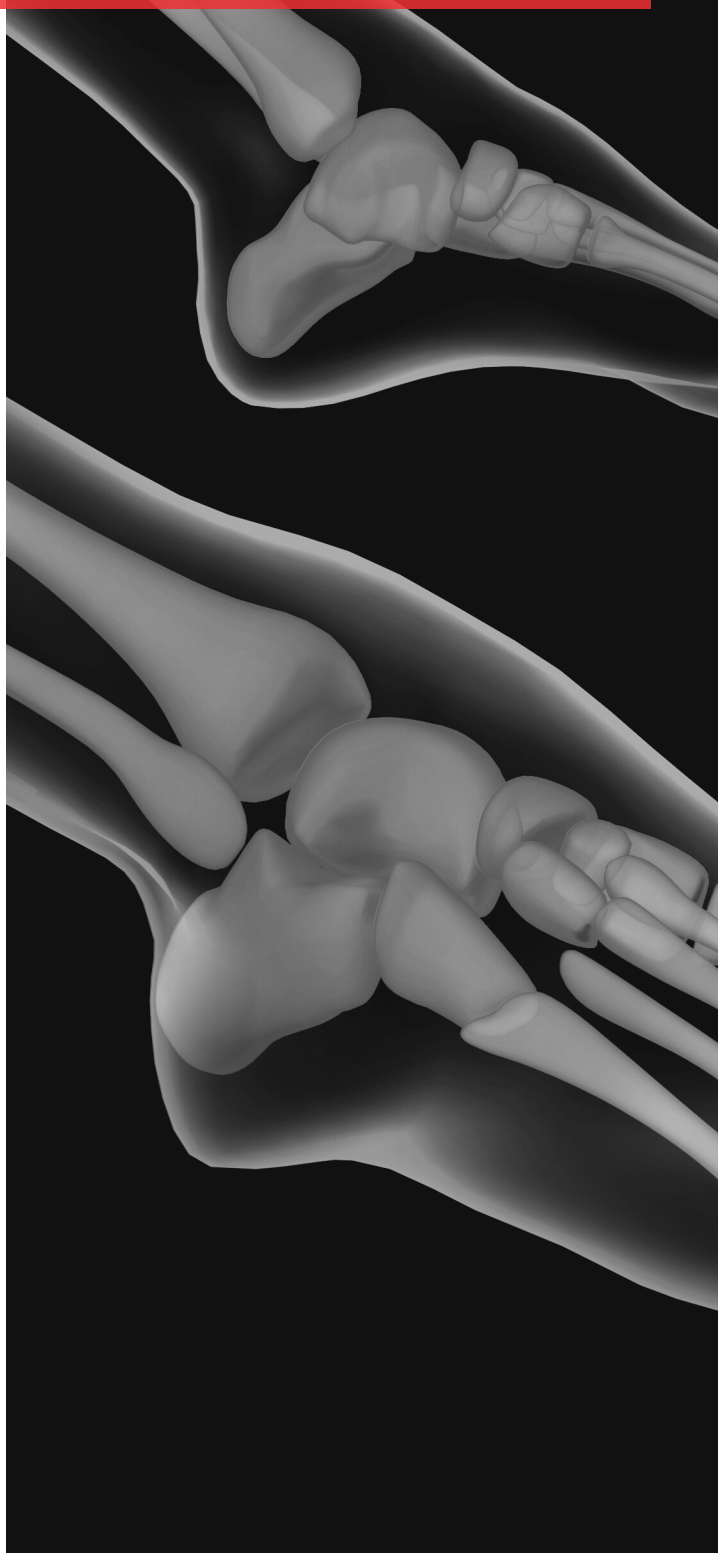
The outlook for ankle sprains is varied. Minor sprains will feel better after a couple of weeks. Whereas very severe sprains could take months to feel better.

There's also a danger that muscles and ligaments could be weakened following a sprain so simply leaving it untreated may lead to future ankle/leg/foot problems or reoccurrences of the same injury.

Physiotherapy is advised for all ankle sprains, even the mild ones. We can help then back to your sport or normal daily activities and most importantly help prevent reoccurrence.



EXERCISES



Here are some exercises that can help to alleviate your ankle pain. Remember, take your time, stretch gently and stop immediately if you feel worsening pain.

1.

ANKLE ALPHABET

Sit on a couch or comfortable chair. Extend your leg out and trace the letters of the alphabet in the air with your big toe, moving as much of your foot as you can. Repeat this 2 or 3 times. This gentle exercise helps you to move your ankle in all directions.

2.

ANKLE STRETCHES

Sit on the floor with your leg stretched out in front of you. Wrap a towel or strap around the ball of your foot. Pull back on the towel so your toes move towards you. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and repeat 5 times with a 30 second break in between. Be gentle - you only need feel a mild/moderate stretch in your calf.

3.

ONE LEG BALANCE

With hands on a wall, countertop, or chair back, lift your good leg behind you so that your weight rests on the leg with the injured ankle. Try to hold this for 20-30 seconds and repeat 3-5 times. As you get stronger, try doing it only with the support of one or two fingers, and eventually without holding on.

PREVENTION TIPS



Ankle sprains are pretty impossible to avoid completely, but here are some tips for trying to lessen your chances of sustaining one:

- 1) Remember to warm up and cool down properly after undertaking exercise or sport.
- 2) Don't exercise too hard - listen to your body and don't overdo things.
- 3) Make exercise part of your regular routine. A combination of both cardio and strengthening exercises are necessary for helping to prevent every day injuries like ankle sprains.
- 4) If you're experiencing ankle pain after exercise, a slip, twist, trip or fall remember to use 'POLICE' (refer to page 1).
- 5) If you are unfortunate enough to suffer an ankle sprain take some time to rest. It's advisable to stop strenuous exercise such as running, dancing, jumping, etc. for up to two months, depending on the severity of the sprain.

They may be common but it doesn't make ankle sprains any less painful. We're helping clients with ankle sprains and strains daily, so don't hesitate to get in touch should you want assistance with your recovery.

FOR MORE ADVICE OR TO BOOK A CONSULTATION, CONTACT W5PHYSIO: