

Live Well to
Learn Well

Web:
health.cornell.edu

Phone (24/7):
607-255-5155

Fax:
607-255-0269

Appointments:
Monday–Saturday

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information

110 Ho Plaza,
Ithaca, NY
14853-3101

Ankle sprains are common injuries. It is estimated that 7 out of 1000 people a year incur an ankle sprain, due to the person's foot rolling in or pointing down and inward.

What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments, most commonly on the outer side of the ankle. Severity of a sprain can range from a minor stretch to a total rupture of the ligaments, which can cause a serious instability of the whole joint. Depending on the severity of the damage, individuals experience varying degrees of pain, swelling, bruising, loss of range of motion, and inability to bear weight.

Early intervention

Early intervention and proper treatment of an ankle sprain are critical. The latest research states that there is a high re-injury rate (as high as 80%) following an ankle sprain and potential for further joint damage. It is very important to follow the guidelines recommended by your health care provider, which may include the following steps below in the acute phase of your injury.

The evidence-based literature is very clear that home exercise programs alone are not as effective at restoring an ankle to its pre-injury state or preventing further ankle sprains. A combination of an individualized rehabilitation program, under the direction of a physical therapist or certified athletic trainer, with a home exercise program has been shown to provide better pain relief and improved function following an ankle sprain.

Follow these steps to help you reduce the pain, swelling and inflammation:

Ice ... Place a plastic bag of ice on the injury for 15–20 minutes. If you use a commercial ice pack or gel pack, place a thin cloth between the ice and your skin to protect the skin area. (Commercial cold packs can cause a freezer-type burn on the skin). Repeat every one to two hours until pain and swelling subside or you are instructed differently in rehabilitation.

Elevate ... Sit or lie in a position so the injured ankle rests at a level higher than the heart to reduce swelling and pain.

Rest ... Abstain from any activity that causes pain in the ankle. If it is painful to walk or put



Cornell's hilly campus poses a challenge for those recovering from ankle sprains. Be sure to get the care and support you need to heal.

weight on your foot, use crutches to decrease the stress to your ankle. If you were given an ankle support, wear it until you follow up with a health care provider.

Practical advice

If you have sprained your ankle, you may benefit from a rehabilitation program that includes manual therapy and a supervised exercise program. Potential benefits are less pain and improved ability to perform daily activities and return to full function. Your physical therapist or certified athletic trainer can perform a thorough evaluation to help determine if you are a good candidate for this treatment as part of a program designed to help get you back to full activity after an ankle sprain. For more information on the treatment of ankle sprains, contact a physical therapist or your athletic trainer, if you are a member of a Cornell team.

On-campus physical therapy

Each year, Cornell Health's physical therapy department sees many people with ankle sprains. Our physical therapists, trained in orthopedic musculoskeletal examinations, evaluate concerns and offer customized individual treatment programs. PT services are offered in Schoellkopf Hall, Monday through Friday. To schedule an appointment for an initial evaluation, please call 607-255-7217. For more information, visit: health.cornell.edu/PT.

