

# Sprains

## **What is a sprain?**

A sprain is an injury that causes a stretch or a tear in a ligament. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue that connect bones at a joint.

Sprains may be classified as mild, moderate, or severe.

## **How does it occur?**

A twisting or severe stretching of a joint is the usual cause of a sprain.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Your joint is swollen and painful.

You may not be able to move the injured joint.

The skin of the joint may be red at first. In a few hours to days, it may look bruised.

## **How are sprains diagnosed?**

Your health care provider will examine your injury. You may have an x-ray to make sure you have not broken a bone.

## **How are sprains treated?**

The general rule for treating sprains is R-I-C-E:

- ▶ **Rest:** At first you will need to avoid activities that cause pain. If you have an ankle sprain or knee sprain you may need crutches.

- ▶ **Ice:** Put ice packs on the sprained area for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours. Do this for 2 to 3 days or until the swelling goes away.
- ▶ **Compression:** Your health care provider may recommend that you wrap an elastic bandage around your injured joint to reduce swelling.
- ▶ **Elevation:** Keep the injured joint above the level of your heart as much as you can until the swelling stops.

Also:

- ▶ Your health care provider may give you a device to help support the joint, such as a splint, brace, or sling.
- ▶ Your health care provider may recommend anti-inflammatory medication or another pain reliever.
- ▶ You may be given exercises to help you recover faster.
- ▶ Some sprains with complete tearing of ligaments may need surgery.

## **How can I prevent a sprain?**

Most sprains occur from accidents that are not easily prevented. However, make sure you wear proper shoes for your activities. Watch for uneven surfaces when you are walking or exercising.