



Treating Strains and Sprains

Strains and sprains happen when muscles or other soft tissues near your bones stretch or tear. These injuries can cause bruising, swelling, and pain. To ease your discomfort and speed the healing of your strain or sprain, follow the tips below. Remember, a strain or sprain can take 6 to 8 weeks to heal.

Important Note:
Do not give aspirin to children or teens.

Ice First, Heat Later

- Use **ice** for the first 24-48 hours after injury. Ice helps prevent swelling and reduce pain. Ice the injury for no more than 20 minutes at a time.
- **Apply heat** after the first 48 hours. Heat relaxes muscles and increases blood flow. Soak the injured area in warm water or use a heating pad set on low for no more than 15 minutes at a time.

Wrap and Elevate

- **Wrap** an injured limb firmly with an elastic bandage. This provides support and helps prevent swelling. Don't wear an elastic bandage overnight.
- **Elevate** the injured area to help reduce swelling and throbbing. It's best to raise an injured limb above the level of your heart.



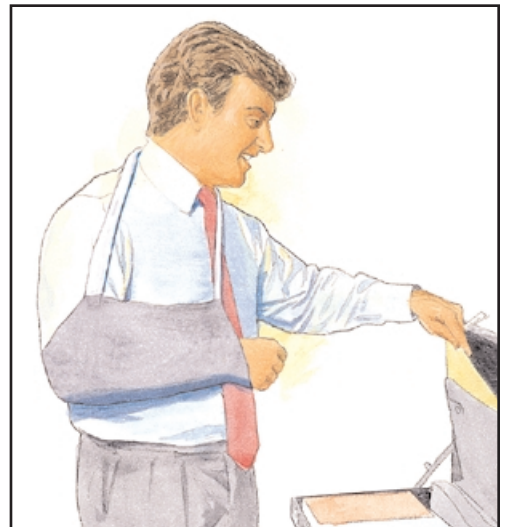
To help reduce pain and swelling, ice, wrap, and raise the injured area.

Medications

- Over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen can help reduce pain. Some also help reduce swelling.
- Take medications only as directed.
- Rest the area even if medications are controlling the pain.

Rest

- Rest the injured area by not using it for 24 hours.
- When you're ready, return slowly to your normal activities. Rest the injured area often.
- Don't use or walk on an injured limb if it hurts.



Notes



Self-Care for Strains and Sprains

Most minor strains and sprains can be treated with self-care. But if you have torn tissue or damaged blood vessels, nerves, or bones, be sure to call your doctor. Recovering from a strain or sprain may take 6-8 weeks. Your self-care goal is to reduce pain and immobilize the injury to speed healing.

Support the Injured Area

Wrapping the injured area provides support for short, necessary activities. Be careful not to wrap the area too tightly. This could cut off the blood supply.

- Support a wrist, elbow, or shoulder with a sling.
- Wrap an ankle or knee with an elastic bandage.
- Tape a finger or toe to the one next to it.

Use Cold and Heat

Cold reduces swelling. Both cold and heat reduce pain. When using cold or heat, always place a towel between the pack and your skin.

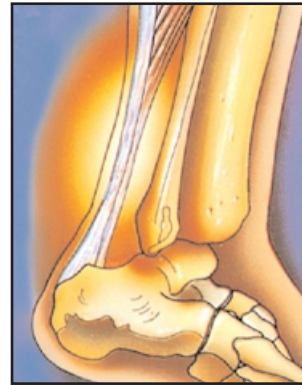
- Apply ice or a cold pack 10-15 minutes every hour you're awake for the first 2 days.
- After the swelling goes down, use cold or heat to control pain. Don't use heat late in the day, since it can cause swelling when you're not active.

Rest and Elevate

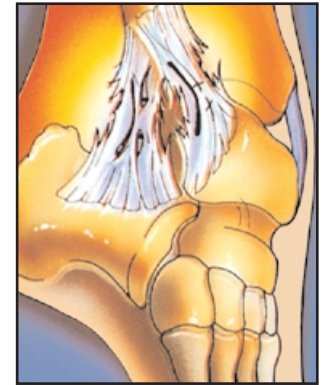
Rest and elevation help your injury heal faster.

- Raise the injured area above your heart level.
- Keep the injured area from moving.
- Limit the use of the joint or limb.

Notes



A strain injures muscles or tendons (tissue that connects muscles to bones).



A sprain injures ligaments (tissue that connects bones to bones).

Call Your Doctor If:

- The injured joint won't move, or bones make a grating sound when they move.
- You can't put weight on the injured area, even after 24 hours.
- The injured body part is cold, blue, or numb.
- The joint or limb appears bent or crooked.
- Pain increases or doesn't improve in 4 days.
- When pressing along the injured area, you notice a spot that is especially painful.

Use Medications

- Motrin reduces pain and swelling. (Note: Don't give motrin to a child 18 or younger unless prescribed by the doctor.)
- Tylenol can reduce pain. Some substitutes reduce swelling, too. Ask your doctor which substitutes you can use.