

Ankle

1. You have been diagnosed as having sustained a sprained ankle. This advice sheet is designed to help you to recover from this injury and regain full function as soon as possible. We strongly advise you to have your ankle reviewed within a week of the injury. It is not normal to be unable to weight bear on your ankle beyond 5 days.

2. Ankle sprains are due to damage to ankle ligaments – bands of strong fibrous tissue that support and strengthen joints by joining bones to each other. When a ligament is sprained, these fibres are stretched and torn. Not surprisingly, the greater the force the worse the injury. Occasionally, as the ligament is stressed, it pulls away a small fragment of the bone to which it is attached – this is called an ‘avulsion fracture’.

3. When a ligament is torn, small blood vessels along it bleed. In addition, your body increases the blood flow to the injured area – this causes more swelling and bruising, which in turn causes more pain. This is often to the point that you cannot put weight on the ankle or can only walk using part of your foot.

4. Ankle x-rays are only required when there is definite pain over an ankle bone or when you are unable to walk on the ankle. Thankfully, the vast majority of ankle injuries do not involve broken bones!

5. General measures that will help your ankle in the first 48 hours –

Protection – from further injury – take it easy and don’t overstress your ankle. If your ankle has been splinted or bandaged, follow any guidance you have been given.

Rest – Initially, continued activity can increase the amount of bleeding and swelling. Recovery is assisted by resting the ankle, at least initially. You may need crutches to assist you for the first day or so.

Ice – Helps reduce initial swelling and pain. Use crushed ice in a damp tea towel or cloth, a gel pack or a pack of frozen vegetables. Apply for a maximum of 20 mins at a time every 2 hours. Stop if this causes the injured area to be more painful or to become red or blotchy.

DO NOT APPLY HEAT IN THE FIRST 48 HOURS AFTER INJURY – IT WILL CAUSE MORE BLEEDING, SWELLING AND PAIN.

Compression – Helps to reduce swelling and supply support. Do not apply a bandage too tightly.

Elevation – This is v. important to minimise swelling. Always try and keep the affected leg elevated at rest.

Drugs – see no. 6 .

6. If you are able to take them (check with the chemist if in doubt) take an anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen 400mg regularly three times a day. Don’t think of them purely as pain killers (although they will help the pain) – they are best taken regularly for at least 5 days rather than here and there when the pain gets bad.

7. If you can, go and see a physiotherapist – either via your GP or refer yourself (look one up in the Yellow Pages)

After the first 48 hours the application of ice can stop. The emphasis should now be on gentle mobilisation to aid a return to full function. One of the best ways to do this initially is to roll your foot back and forwards over a bottle which will gently exercise the ankle in all the right directions. Do this for a maximum of 10 minutes at a time. If it feels comfortable, you may also increase the amount of weight that you are putting on the ankle, concentrating on walking properly and not twisting the ankle again. In particular, take care when going up or down steps, crossing pavements or walking on uneven ground – these are all times when the ankle may tend to turn in and be sprained again. As time goes by and the pain and swelling settle, you will be able to gradually increase back up to full mobility. IF IT HURTS, YOU’RE DOING TOO MUCH TOO SOON!!

If you are particularly sporty....

Be patient and don’t try to rush things too quickly. A repeat injury at this stage will put you out of action for much longer! If at all possible, try and see a physiotherapist who can guide your rehabilitation. Unless advised otherwise, start with gentle walks. When it becomes possible to do so, start jogging – firstly in a straight line only in order to avoid stressing the ligaments. If all seems ok, after a few days you can progress onto jogging in a figure of eight pattern where the figures of eight are initially quite large, putting little stress onto the ankle. As your fitness improves, gradually decrease the size of the figures of eight which will help to strengthen up the ligaments.

How long will recovery take?

Maximum swelling usually occurs within 48 hours. As a result, the swelling (and pain) may get slightly worse before it gets better. If you can’t already, you should be able to start putting some weight on your ankle again after about 3-4 days and it should be noticeably better after 5-7 days. IF IT IS NOT, YOU SHOULD SEE A DOCTOR. We normally recommend that all ankle injuries are reassessed by a doctor after one week so that the injury and the strength of the ligaments can be assessed. Depending on the extent of the injury, full healing will take between 3-8 weeks. Do not take part in aggressive physical activity or sport before this time unless a doctor or physio advises you that you may.

Snowboarders' ankle

This is an unusual but important injury that affects snowboarders and is difficult to diagnose – it is a fracture (break) of the lateral process of the talus bone in the ankle. It presents just like a severe ankle sprain but unfortunately does not show up on ankle x-rays which usually look normal. Added to this, most doctors outwith ski areas are unlikely to have heard of this injury and realise how important it is. As a general rule, if you are still unable to weight bear on your ankle after 5 days and/or the pain is persistent, get your ankle reassessed by your doctor.

If they need more information about this injury, ask them to visit www.ski-injury.com/snowboard.htm

Whilst the information presented in this leaflet is done so in good faith, based on the latest available information - neither Dr Mike Langran nor CairnGorm Mountain can accept any liability for any accident, injury or fatality arising as a result of following this advice. Skiers and snowboarders are (for the most part) human and as such everyone varies - tailor this advice to your own needs as much as possible. If in any doubt, consult your own doctor.

ADVICE AND EXERCISES AFTER INJURY FOR ANKLE'S



CAIRNGORM SKI PATROL WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS FOR THE CONTINUED SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

