

### What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain is one of the most common lower limb injuries and usually occurs when the ankle and/or foot are suddenly forced inwards. This results in injury to the ligaments on the outside of the ankle. Ligaments are bands of tissue within the body which help to keep joints stable.

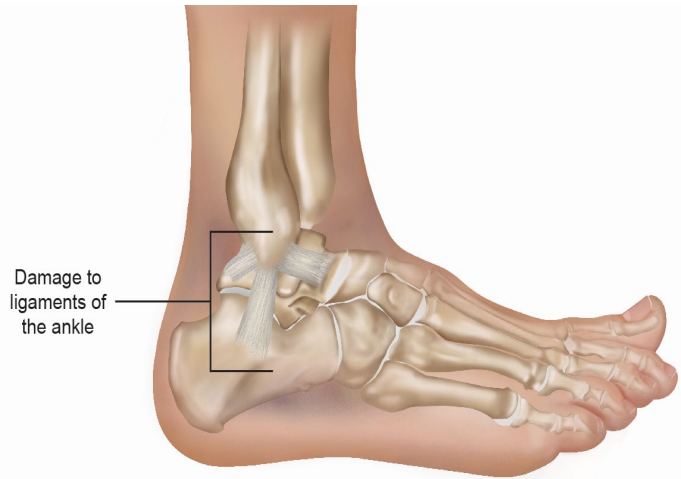
Ankle sprain usually results in stretching or tearing of these ligaments. Most people experience pain, swelling, loss of function and sometimes difficulty weight bearing. Sometimes you may experience a “popping” or “tearing” sensation during the injury.

There are varying degrees of ankle sprain, therefore recovery time depends on the degree of injury sustained. Recovery can take anything from a couple of weeks to several months.

Most ankle sprains heal well, and people will be able to return to normal activities within 6 to 8 weeks using conservative treatments such as rest, ice, painkillers and exercise. Returning to sporting activities can take 8 - 12 weeks. Rehabilitation is very important to ensure that the ankle is strong enough to return to full activity and reduce the chance of re-injury. Recurrence is common within the first year following ankle sprain.

### What are the Causes/risk factors?

- Activities involving quick, sudden change of direction or jumping (e.g. Football, Rugby, Dance)
- Sudden change of direction/twisting movements
- Walking/running over uneven ground/terrain
- Tripping or missing a step on stairs
- Footwear e.g. high heels
- Muscle weakness
- Foot shape
- Poor balance/sense of movement
- High body weight



### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary widely depending on the degree of injury. They commonly include:

- Pain, especially on weight bearing
- Swelling/bruising around the ankle and foot
- Tenderness to touch
- Ankle stiffness
- Ankle feels unstable

### How is it diagnosed?

An appropriate healthcare professional will discuss your symptoms and enquire about your general health. A physical examination of your foot and ankle will be carried out to assess your movement, your response to particular tests and level of pain. This condition is diagnosed when a clinician examines your foot/ankle.

An X-Ray is not always required. In some cases, further diagnostic imaging such as an MRI scan may be required.

### How can you manage an ankle sprain?

Most ankle sprains will be managed without surgery. Recovery time can vary depending on the severity of the injury, as ankle sprains range from a slight stretch to complete tear of the ankle ligaments.

Many patients are happy to self-manage their symptoms with the treatments below:

- Home exercises: NHS Inform website: [Exercises for calf and ankle muscle or joint problems](#)
- Changes to your activity levels to allow the ankle to recover
- Using a cold compress on the affected area
- Use of taping/ankle brace
- Rest and immobilisation (as required)
- Gradual return to your normal activity levels

### Lifestyle and health changes

The following adjustments to your lifestyle can also help you recover:

- Maintaining a healthy diet and weight
- Getting regular physical activity
- Getting 7 - 9 hours of quality sleep per night
- Reducing your alcohol intake
- Quit smoking

Not all of these recommendations may be relevant to you, but these are important factors to consider to optimise the best outcome for you.

If your symptoms don't improve after 6 to 12 weeks with the above approach, a referral by your GP or a self referral to a Physiotherapist may be beneficial.

### Do I need surgery?

Surgery for an ankle sprain is rare. It is only required for injuries that fail to improve with non-surgical treatment, and if you continue to experience pain and/or ankle instability after months of non-surgical treatment. Sometimes surgery is recommended if a severe ankle sprain is associated with other injuries, such as tendon rupture or cartilage injury.

Surgical options include:

- **Ankle arthroscopy**- The surgeon will use a small camera (arthroscope) to look inside your ankle joint and instruments can be used to remove/repair injured tissue.
- **Lateral ligament repair/reconstruction**- The surgeon repairs the torn ligament with stitches or sutures. In some cases the damaged ligament will be repaired using a tissue graft obtained from other ligaments and/or tendons found in and around the foot and ankle.

### Recovery:

- A period of immobilisation in a moonboot or cast typically up to 6 weeks to protect the ligaments is required, to be guided by the surgeon and individual recovery
- Rehabilitation is essential following surgery to maximise recovery and the reduce chance of re-injury
- Rehabilitation typically takes more than 4 to 6 months
- Return to contact sports predicted between 4 - 6 months, however it can vary depending on individual recovery.

For appointment enquiries, please phone the  
Waiting list office: 0131 2423437