

SPRAINS & STRAINS

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

3.2

DESCRIPTION

A strain is a stretched or torn muscle or tendon. A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament. Sprains occur most often in ankles, knees or fingers, although any joint can be sprained. Sprained joints can function, but usually with pain.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain or tenderness in the area of injury; severity varies with the extent of injury.
- Swelling of the affected area.
- Redness or bruising in the area of injury, either immediately or several hours after injury.
- Loss of normal mobility in the injured area.

CAUSES

Strains are usually associated with overuse injuries. Sprains usually occur secondary to trauma (ex: fall, twisting injury, automobile accident). The ankle is injured most often because of its anatomical weakness, its exposed position and the stress it sustains in athletic and recreational activities. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate sprains from strains.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Obesity.
- Trauma.
- Excessive exercise.
- Poor conditioning.
- Poor fitting shoes and high heeled shoes.
- High risk activities (skateboarding), contact sports, ice and roller skating.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Maintain good level of physical fitness.
- Avoid injury.
- Stretch muscles before and after exercise.
- Strengthen weak muscles with rehabilitative exercises to prevent a recurrence.
- Accident-proof your home.
- Do not mix exercise and alcohol.
- Dress appropriately for the activity.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

With appropriate treatment and rest, 6-8 weeks for recovery. Recovery may take longer depending on severity of the injury.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Permanent weakness if the sprain is severe or a joint is sprained repeatedly.
- Arthritis.

GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnostic tests may include X-rays or CT scan or MRI of the injured area.

RICE therapy (rest, ice, compression, elevation).

- Rest. Do not try to work through the pain. Your body needs time to heal when resuming activities. Start over, do not start from where you left off.
- Apply ice to the injured area during the first 48 hours. Place ice in a plastic bag and separate it from the skin with a thin towel. Hold it against the area with your hand or an elastic bandage. Keep the ice pack on the area for 20 minutes every 3-4 hours.
- Compression with an elastic (Ace) bandage.
- Whenever possible, elevate the area (especially while sleeping) so fluid can drain and diminish swelling. Surgery may be necessary to repair badly torn ligaments. A cast may be necessary for severe sprains or following surgery. Following cast removal, you may wear support bandages for a while. Crutches are sometimes needed.

MEDICATION

You may use non-prescription pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If the sprain is severe, a stronger pain reliever may be prescribed. Avoid aspirin as it may increase the tendency to bleed.

ACTIVITY

Allow the area to rest 1 or 2 days. Then begin exercising the area gently, without putting weight on it. Rehabilitation may be recommended to regain strength and normal use of the joint. No special diet.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Swelling or bruising increases, despite treatment.
- Pain becomes intolerable.

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



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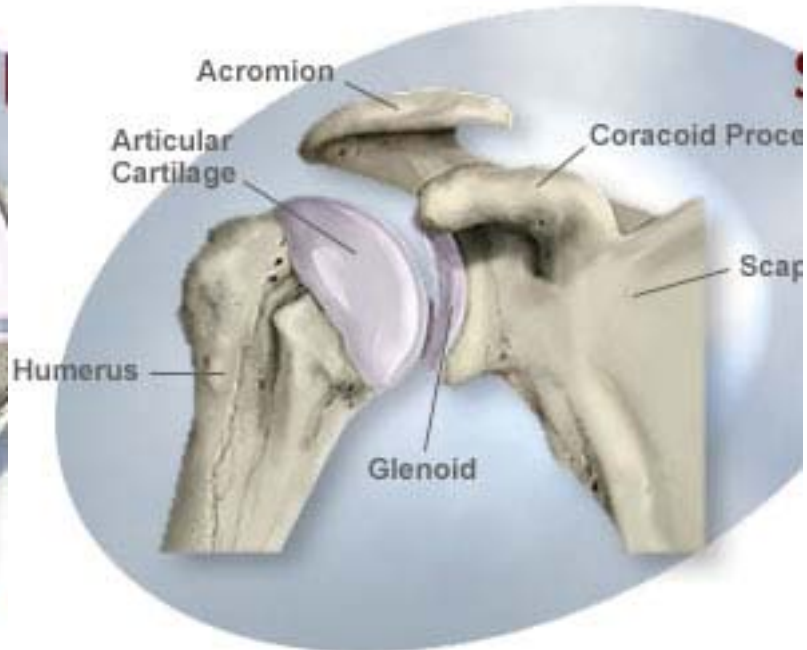
618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.

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