

Sprains

This is a short guide for **sprains**.

Sprains are due to injured ligaments and often affect the thumb, wrist, ankle and knee. Typical symptoms of a **sprain** include pain around a joint, swelling, tenderness, and an inability to use the joint normally. Swelling often occurs almost immediately, whereas the onset of bruising may be delayed. **Sprains** are common, but often go unreported. Ankle **sprain** is the most common type of **sprain**, often occurring during sports and resulting in 1 to 1.5 million Accident & Emergency (A&E) department visits in the UK each year. You're at higher risk of suffering **sprains** if you don't warm up properly when taking part in sport, or if you exercise when you're tired.

Most **sprains** get better by themselves and usually resolve within six to eight weeks, depending on where the injury is and how bad it is. This is opposed to a fracture – a broken bone – which usually requires medical investigation and treatment.

So what can you do to get better?

- PRICE Protecting the affected limb, resting it, and using ice, compression bandages and elevation (PRICE) are useful for treating injuries initially. Avoid heat, alcohol, running (or any other form of exercise) and massage (HARM) in the first 72 hours after an injury.
- If you've suffered a **sprain**, gently move your limb in all possible directions (as soon as your pain allows) to increase and maintain flexibility. Avoid immobilising the affected body part – except in severe ankle **sprains**, where immobilisation can lead to a quicker recovery.
- Painkillers and ointments are widely available over the counter (OTC) and can be used to relieve pain and reduce swelling. If you need help with these talk to your pharmacist.

Seek medical advice if your symptoms signs include:

- Your pain is severe and not controlled by OTC medication.
- Your symptoms don't start to improve after three to four days of selftreatment.
- You can't walk because of your injury, or an affected leg 'gives way' and makes you walk unsteadily.
- The affected body part is deformed, or shows lumps or bumps.
- You can't move an affected joint.
- Your skin over the affected area feels numb.
- You notice more than only mild bruising and swelling.

More information can be found on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/conditions