Ankle Sprain Advice - Local NHS Guidance

The ankle is a complicated joint and it is commonly injured. Almost half of injuries are as a result of playing sports or exercising. A sprained ankle is the most common sports injury. Often the ankle is turned outwards (away from the body), this is called an 'inversion' sprain. Whereas, if the ankle is sprained by the foot turning inwards (into the body) this is called 'eversion'.

What is an ankle sprain?

An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments of the ankle joint. These are elastic-band like structures which hold the bones of the ankle joint together and prevent excess twisting and turning. These ligaments normally stretch slightly and then retract back to their normal shape & size. A sprain occurs when these ligaments have been stretched beyond their limits. In a severe sprain, these ligaments may be partially or completely torn. These tears may take several weeks to heal and you may have pain and swelling for up to 3-4 weeks. You may notice this more in the evening or after a lot of walking.

Advice to Patients

Painkillers

Take regular analgesia to help you move more easily and to gently exercise the injured limb. Paracetamol is ideal or Paracetamol and Codeine but you may need to see a Doctor if you require stronger prescribed pain killers. Oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) like Ibuprofen can also help reduce the swelling and inflammation but should only be used three days after the injury. This is because if they are used before this time, they may adversely affect the healing process.

Rest

Rest the injured limb for the next24-48 hours with the foot elevated but gently mobilise the injured area to prevent stiffness.

Ice

Ice may be applied to the ankle for up to 20 minutes every two hours for the first 24-48 hours. A bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel

is ideal. You can also get disposable ice packs from the lodge or the College Nurse. Do Not apply ice directly to the skin as this may cause a cold burn.

Elevation
The leg should be elevated while resting. This means that your ankle should be at a higher level than your heart. Avoid having long periods of time when the leg is not rested.

Exercise
It is important to move your ankle and to start walking normally (without a limp) as soon as you are able. Wear flat shoes which support the foot properly and be careful on uneven ground. Exercises will strengthen the muscles around your ankle providing added support to the joint.

Things to avoid for the first 72 hours

- Heat: Such as hot baths, saunas and heat packs
- Alcohol: Drinking alcohol may increase bleeding and swelling and decrease healing
- Running: Or any other form of exercise as this could cause more damage
- Massage: Which may increase bleeding or swelling
- Driving: You should avoid driving until the strength and mobility has returned to your ankle. The length of time that you are unable to drive will depend on the extent of your injury and how quickly you recover.

It will be safe to return to normal activity when you:

- have full strength
- have full range of movement
- can use your ankle normally without pain or swelling

Sprain Grading
Grade I - mild stretching of the ligament without joint instability
Grade II - partial tear (rupture) of the ligament but without joint instability (or with mild instability)
Grade III - a severe sprain: complete rupture of the ligament with instability of the joint

Sprained Ankle Exercises

1. Draw your foot up as far as possible, with toes pointing towards you. Hold for five seconds. The point your foot away from you as far as possible. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times.

2. Turn the sole of your foot inwards, keeping your knee still. Hold for five seconds. Then turn the sole of your foot outwards, keeping your knee still. Hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times.

3. Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor. Slide the foot of your injured ankle along the floor behind you, making sure you keep your foot on the floor. Repeat ten times.

4. Sit on a chair and place a towel flat on the floor. Put the foot of your injured ankle on the towel, with you heel on the edge. Using your toes, bunch the towel, and pull it towards you.

5. Sit on a chair, feel flat on the floor. Try to keep your heels directly below your knees if possible. Raise the front parts of your feet off the floor, keeping your heels on the floor. Hold for five seconds and then lower. Now raise your heels off the floor, keeping the balls of your feet on the floor. Hold for five seconds and then lower. Repeat ten times.

6. Sitting on a high chair, use your foot as a 'pen' and try writing out the alphabet in the air. Do these three to four times a day. If you have persistent problems with pain, swelling or loss of function, or your ankle is not progressively recovering please contact your College Nurse or Doctor or ED.

Comments from the College Nurse

The use of compression to reduce swelling is not now recommended but some people find ankle support feels more comfortable. The College Nurse has a supply of bandages or tubigrip and can loan crutches to students if full weight bearing is a problem.

The College Nurse can come and see you in your College accommodation if you can't make it to the Clinic. Please email

college.nurse@bnc.ox.ac.uk or leave a message on her mobile 07818 068641

Please be aware that bruising is affected by gravity and may move downwards after injury.

The College has a taxi policy for student's with mobility problems. Please see the Student Handbook: sectionE.2.6 'College Policy on Welfare Taxis'.

If you would like details of both local NHS & Private Physiotherapists, please email the College Nurse college.nurse@bnc.ox.ac.uk

If you need to miss academic commitments, please let you Tutors know via email as soon as possible.