

Ankle Sprains

WHAT IS A SPRAIN?

A sprain is an injury that occurs when a ligament has been stretched too far causing some tearing to the ligament. A ligament is a fibrous structure that connects two bones together. In the ankle, the ligaments on the outside (lateral) portion of the ankle are more commonly affected than the ligaments on the inside (medial) portion of the ankle.



HOW ARE THEY INJURED?

An ankle sprain is the most common sports related injury, but can occur during many different activities. Typically, the ankle is sprained with twisting injuries of the ankle. As the ligaments are stretched, they can begin to tear. The degree of tearing can range from small tears of a few of the fibers to complete rupture of the ligament.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The symptoms of an ankle sprain can vary depending on severity of the sprain. Typically, patients complain of pain and swelling of the outside (lateral) portion of the ankle immediately following a twisting injury. The pain is typically worse with walking. Frequently, bruising will develop over a few days following the injury. Severe ankle sprains can cause instability of the ankle. Occasionally, a popping sensation can occur at the time of injury.

DO I NEED SURGERY?

Most ankle sprains will not require surgery. Even many severe sprains can be treated without surgery with proper rehabilitation. The first phase in treatment is rest and immobilization. This involves rest, ice, elevation, and compression as well as bracing, boot, or casting depending on the degree of sprain. The second phase focuses on range of motion and strengthening exercises. This phase begins when the patient can bear weight comfortably with or without a brace. The final phase involves endurance and agility training as well as a balance and maintenance program. The time spent in each phase is variable and depends on the patient's individual progress. Surgery is only discussed in individuals with persistent pain and instability after months of well-focused physical therapy.

ARE THERE ANY ADVERSE OUTCOMES?

Incomplete physical therapy or an inadequate maintenance program can lead to chronic ankle instability. Continued imbalance and muscle weakness can lead to re-injury. Prolonged immobilization can cause stiffness, which can lead to slower recovery time and return to sport.