Soft tissue injuries to the foot and ankle

Introduction
This information and exercise sheet should be used as a guide to recovery following a simple ankle sprain.

You have a soft tissue injury which is usually accompanied by pain, tenderness, swelling, bruising and some restriction of movement.

The first 24 hours after an injury are very important and you can expect the ankle to be painful and swollen. This can be minimised by following the advice below.

First 24 hours - PRICE the affected part

Protect
Rest
Ice
Compress
Elevate

Protect
Protect the foot or ankle from undue stress which may cause further damage or delay healing. This means discontinuing activities which increase your symptoms such as: running, jumping, dancing.

Rest
This does not mean lie down and wait until the problem goes away, but to restrict activity as much as possible. This may mean using crutches. Any unaffected parts of your leg may still be exercised.

Ice
Applying ice or cold water to the injured area for 15 minutes every 2 hour, this helps reduce bruising. The skin will become red and cold. Make sure you check the area every 5 minutes and note the following advice:
If the skin becomes white, blue or blotchy. Stop immediately and remove the ice pack
If the area becomes excessively painful, numb or tingles, remove the ice pack.

**Important**
- Ice treatment must be used carefully otherwise it may burn the skin
- Only use an ice pack on areas of normal skin sensation (where you can feel hot and cold)
- Never apply a dry ice pack straight onto the skin
- Never apply directly over an open wound or graze
- Do not apply ice to an area with poor circulation.

**Compress**
We do not apply compress around such injuries and recommend you do not.

**Elevate**
Ideally, support the injured leg in a raised position; a little above your hip is best for your foot. This is best achieved by supporting the length of the leg on a pillow but with your heel resting in mid-air.

This will help circulation, reduce fluid, swelling and prevent the development of pressure sores on your heel.

It is important to get the ankle moving. This includes walking and slowly increasing the amount of time you are on your feet. You need to maintain a good range of movement, so start the exercises straight away.

**Exercises**
These exercises should be repeated initially 10 times twice per day and increasing to 20 times four times per day over the following week.

1. When sitting or lying, circle your ankle and foot in 1 direction and then the other.
2. When sitting or lying move your foot up and down at the ankle. Try to move as far as you feel comfortable.

3. When sitting with your foot on the floor. Turn the soles of the feet in towards each other, then turn them out away from each other.

4. Place a towel around the ball of your injured foot, and pull gently towards you until you feel a stretch in the calf. This should be held for 10 to 20 seconds (start with shorter times if needed).

**Walking and walking aids**

When walking with or without a walking aid always try to put you heel down first and push off through your toes. Incorrect walking, toe walking and limping will possibly delay healing and may cause additional injuries. Please refer to the advice leaflet on walking aids if you have been issued with a walking aid. Walking aids should only be used as directed and it is important to walk as normally as possible.

**Pain relief**

It is important to take regular pain relief and not wait until the pain is unbearable. Discuss with your local pharmacist and follow any instructions on the packet. Ibrufen should ideally be avoided until the injury is 48 hours old, because it will act against the body’s initial healing response.

**Remember**

With soft tissue injuries there is a risk of an undetected fracture and usually we will contact you should this be the case but if your symptoms are not improving after 7 days, please return to the Emergency Department or your local Minor Injuries Unit to be reassessed. Should the pain in your foot or ankle increase, or continue to swell, become hot to touch then you need to seek further advice and support. This can be obtained from your GP, NHS 111 or return to the Emergency Department.
Further information
You can refer yourself to our 'Physio Direct' service that has been set up to provide early advice and management for adults.

Physio Direct
Gloucestershire Hospitals
Tel: 0300 422 8128

Cheltenham General Hospitals
Tel: 0300 422 2507

Website: 
www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/en/WardsandDepartments/Departments/Physiotherapy/See-Physiotherapist/

Arthritis Research UK
Website: www.arthritisresearchuk.org

Content reviewed: November 2015