



Ankle Injuries Deserve More Respect

If you're like most people, you ice your sprained ankle and try to get back on your feet as soon as possible. But there is a twist. By not giving your ankle adequate time to heal, you could put yourself at risk for chronic foot and ankle problems.

"Ankle sprains are one of the most neglected musculoskeletal injuries," says Dr. Glenn Pfeffer, director of the Foot and Ankle Center at Cedars-Sinai Orthopedic Center. "We've almost all had an ankle injury at one point, but we take them for granted and under-treat them."

If your ankle turns sharply inward or outward when you're exercising or even walking in high-heeled shoes, the sudden pulling can stretch or tear ligaments. A sprain causes swelling, discoloration, tenderness, and results in difficulty walking.

There are three grades of ankle sprains. The amount of force on the ligaments determines the grade level.

- Grade 1 sprain – slight stretching and some damage to the ligament
- Grade 2 sprain – partial tearing of the ligament
- Grade 3 sprain – complete tearing of the ligament

Immediate treatment for a Grade 1 or 2 sprain is RICE – Rest, Ice, Compress, Elevate. See your doctor so he or she can determine if an x-ray is needed to rule out any broken bones. For Grade 2 sprains, your doctor may recommend a splint. Grade 3 sprains are the most severe. Surgery is rarely needed, but a leg cast or brace may be used for the first two or three weeks.

Depending on the grade of your sprain, it may be one to three weeks before you can resume light activity. Your doctor will determine the best schedule for you.

Warming up before exercising is the best way to prevent ankle injury. It is an important step to reducing your risk of chronic foot and ankle problems. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons also recommends performing the following exercises several times a week:

- **Stretch your calf and Achilles tendon.** Stand on a stair with one foot just in front of the other. Allow the heel to stretch downward over the edge. Feel the pull in the calf and the bottom of the foot. Do this for 30 seconds, four to six times.
- **Improve your balance.** Stand on one leg with your eyes closed, as long as you can. Build up to 30 seconds. Repeat three times.
- **Strengthen your foot and ankle.** Lying on your side, allow the end of your upper leg to hang over the edge of the sofa. Slowly lift your toes toward the ceiling, hold for three seconds and repeat ten times.

