

Sprains & strains

Sprains and strains are a very common type of injury that affect the muscles and ligaments. Ligaments are strong bands of tissue around joints that connect one bone to another. They help to keep the bones together and stable.



Symptoms of sprains and strains include:

- Pain
- Swelling and inflammation
- Loss of movement in the affected body part

Sprains

A sprain occurs when one or more of your ligaments have been stretched, twisted or torn, usually as a result of excessive force being applied to a joint. Most healthcare professionals recommend that you should not stop using a sprained joint because the injury will heal quicker if you begin to move the joint as soon as you are able to. Your GP will be able to teach you a range of exercises that will help you to improve the function of the joint.

Treating sprains and strains

Most mild to moderate sprains and strains can be treated at home using:

- A self-care technique called PRICE therapy, and
- By avoiding HARM

If you experience pain from a strain or sprain, paracetamol is the first painkiller that we recommend. If paracetamol does not help to relieve your pain, a stronger painkiller (like codeine) which is only available on prescription may be required. Oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can also help to reduce swelling and inflammation. However, NSAIDs should only be considered for use 48 hours after the injury has occurred. Ibuprofen is not recommended if you have a history of asthma or kidney disease or if you have, or have had stomach problems like a peptic ulcer.

PRICE therapy

PRICE stands for Protection, Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. Advice relating to each of these areas is outlined below.

- **Protection** – protect the injured area from further injury – for example, by using a support or in the case of an ankle injury, wearing shoes that enclose and support your feet like lace-ups.
- **Rest** – stop the activity that caused the injury and rest the injured joint or muscle. Avoid activity for the first 48 to 72 hours after injuring yourself. Your GP may recommend that you use crutches.
- **Ice** – for the first 48 to 72 hours after the injury, apply ice wrapped in a damp towel to the injured area for 15 to 20 minutes every two to three hours during the day. Do not leave the ice on while you are asleep, and do not allow the ice to touch your skin directly because it could cause a cold burn.
- **Compression** – compress or bandage the injured area to limit any swelling and movement that could damage it further. You can use a crepe bandage, a simple elastic bandage or an elasticated tubular bandage. It should be wrapped snugly around the affected area but it should not be too tight. Remove the bandage before you go to sleep.
- **Elevation** - keep the injured area raised and supported on a pillow to help reduce the swelling. If your leg is injured, avoid having long periods of time where your leg is not raised.



For more information, help and support go to www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

Choose the right care

Avoiding HARM

For the first 72 hours after a sprain or muscle strain you should avoid HARM. This means that you should avoid:

- Heat – like hot baths, saunas or heat packs (applying a controlled amount of heat to affected joints)
- Alcohol - drinking alcohol will increase bleeding and swelling and decrease healing
- Running - or any other form of exercise that could cause more damage
- Massage - which may increase bleeding and swelling



What to do next...



Choose care at home if...

- You have a mild or moderate sprain or strain
- You can move your muscle or joint, even if there is some pain



Choose your GP surgery if...

- You have severe pain and cannot put any weight on the injured joint or muscle
- You cannot move the injured joint
- The limb gives way when you try to use the joint
- You have numbness in any part of the injured area
- The pain has not improved after four days of self-treatment
- Your symptoms get worse, like increased pain or swelling



Call 999 A&E if...

- The affected area becomes white and cold or red and hot
- The injured area looks crooked or has lumps or bumps (other than swelling) that are not usually present
- You think you might have a serious injury
- A&E is for urgent, life-threatening illness and injury



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Choose the right care