

Ankle sprain

An ankle sprain is when the ligaments (stretchy bands that hold the bones together) in the ankle overstretch. The overstretching tears the ligament, making it bleed (inside), bruise and swell.

If your child's ankle is sprained, they might have some or all of these symptoms:

- pain around the ankle
- bruising, this normally appears 2 to 3 days after the injury
- swelling, this can appear almost immediately or over the next 2 to 3 days
- unable to put normal weight on ankle (weight bear), this might show as a limp or mean that no weight at all can be put on the injured leg

How to look after an ankle sprain

Pain relief

At first your child might need regular painkillers. Use paracetamol or ibuprofen as instructed on the packets. If your child has a pre-existing medical condition, please speak to a doctor or nurse for advice on pain relief.

Cold pack

Wrap an ice pack (or frozen vegetables) in a tea towel and put it on the ankle for up to 15 minutes, every 2 to 4 hours. Make sure the ice is never in direct contact with the skin.

Rest and elevation

Try to get your child to rest for 2 to 3 days after the injury. They might be given crutches, depending on how bad the sprain is and how much weight your child can put on their leg. When they are sitting down, use a pillow or cushion to help raise the ankle to try and reduce swelling.

Early movement and exercise

As the pain eases, encourage your child to gradually get back to normal activities. These exercises are useful to help recovery.

- Ankle alphabet. Use the foot and ankle to spell out the alphabet, or names and words.
- Foot circles. Use the foot and ankle to draw circles in the air.
- Foot pushes. Point the toes down to the floor and then up into the air.

Most ankle injuries start to get better within 2 to 3 days, but can take up to 6 weeks to heal fully. If pain is not settling within 2 weeks, please take your child to their GP.

NHS 111

NHS 111 is a telephone service that offers support and advice 24 hours a day. Please call 111 if you have concerns about your child's health. A fully trained advisor will direct you to appropriate resources or services.

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A list of sources is available on request

