

Sprains and Strains

Sprains are due to injured ligaments and often affect the thumb, wrist, ankle and knee. Typical symptoms of a sprain include pain around a joint, swelling, tenderness, and an inability to use the joint normally. Swelling often occurs almost immediately, whereas the onset of bruising may be delayed.

Muscle strains are caused by over-stretching or tearing of muscle fibres and are common in the legs and lower back – particularly in people who are unfit or do not use good sporting techniques. Muscle strains usually lead to muscle pain and swelling, bruising, and reduced limb function.

Sprains and strains are common, but often go unreported. Ankle sprain is the most common type of sprain, often occurring during sports and resulting in 1 to 1.5 million Accident & Emergency (A&E) department visits in the UK each year. You're at higher risk of suffering sprains and strains if you don't warm up properly when taking part in sport, or if you exercise when you're tired.

Managing your condition

Most sprains and strains get better by themselves and usually resolve within six to eight weeks, depending on where the injury is and how bad it is. After 2 weeks, most sprains and strains will feel better. Avoid strenuous exercise such as running for up to 8 weeks, as there's a risk of further damage.

You're likely to be able to return to full sporting activities at around 12 weeks. But some severe injuries of larger muscles may take several months to heal.

How do I treat?

Try to remember these phrases for immediate treatment of sprains and strains;

Follow - PRICE

Use for treating injuries initially

- **P**rotecting the affected limb
- **R**esting it
- **I**ce - apply ice
- **C**ompression bandage
- **E**levation

Avoid HARM

Avoid all these things in the first 72 hours after injury

- **H**eat
- **A**lcohol
- **R**unning
- **M**assage

Further treatment;

- **Exercises for sprains** - If you've suffered a sprain, gently move your limb in all possible directions (as soon as your pain allows) to increase and maintain flexibility. Avoid immobilising the affected body part – except in severe ankle sprains, where immobilisation can lead to a quicker recovery.
- **Rest for strains** - In strains, however, it's beneficial if you keep the affected muscle still for a few days after the injury before starting to move it again. Do gentle stretching and strengthening exercises and wear appropriate footwear at home, at work and when you take part in sports.
- **Pain relief** - Painkillers and pain relieving gels and ointments are widely available over the counter (OTC) and can be used to relieve pain and reduce swelling. If you need help with these talk to your pharmacist. Painkillers like paracetamol will ease the pain and ibuprofen will bring down swelling. However, you shouldn't take ibuprofen for 48 hours after your injury as it may slow down healing.
- **Speak to your pharmacist** - for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms.



When should I seek advice?

Seek further medical advice if you've suffered a severe sprain or strain that may suggest a broken bone or joint dislocation, if your pain is not controlled by over the counter medication, or if your sprain or strain does not get better as expected.

Warning symptoms and signs include:

Severity - Your pain is severe and not controlled by OTC medication.

- **Duration** - Your symptoms don't start to improve after three to four days of self-treatment.
- **Walking** - You can't walk because of your injury, or an affected leg 'gives way' and makes you walk unsteadily.
- **Deformity** - The affected body part is deformed, or shows lumps or bumps.
- **Movement** - You can't move an affected joint.
- **Numbness** - Your skin over the affected area feels numb.
- **Bruising and swelling** - You notice more than only mild bruising and swelling.

More information is available at the following websites

- NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk
- Stay Well Derbyshire – www.nhsstaywellerbyshire.co.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice