

Sprains and strains

What is a sprain?

A sprain is an injury to ligaments that hold the joints together. The injury may vary from a severe stretch to a partial or complete tear of one or more ligaments.

What is a strain?

A strain is an injury to a muscle or tendon. It may range from a severe stretch (pulled muscle) to a partial or complete tear of one or more muscles or muscle tendons.

Severe sprains and strains may take weeks or even months to heal.

How should I care for a sprain or strain?

1. Some swelling is expected in the first 24 to 48 hours. To help reduce the swelling:
 - Apply ice packs. Protect the skin from frostbite with a towel between the skin and the ice. Apply the ice pack for 20 minutes 4 to 6 times per day, more if tolerated, for the first 24 to 48 hours.
 - Use an Ace® wrap if directed by the doctor.
 - Raise the affected part on pillows.
2. After the first 48 hours, heat can help with healing. Use warm water soaks or a warm (not hot) heating pad for 20 minutes, twice per day.

3. Rest the affected part as much as possible by splinting, or using crutches or a sling as directed.
 - For a knee injury, you may have been given a knee immobilizer. This can be worn over pants. It can be removed for sleeping and bathing unless you are instructed otherwise.
4. For pain, use acetaminophen (Tylenol® or another brand), or ibuprofen (Advil® or another brand). Ibuprofen is usually more helpful because it also decreases swelling.

When should I call the doctor?

- pain increases
- swelling increases after the first 48 hours
- toes or fingers are not as pink and warm as those on the other foot or hand
- numbness or tingling develops in the hand/foot and doesn't go away after raising the affected part for 30 minutes
- not improving in 5 days
- any new or severe problems

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call the clinic.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: www.childrensmn.org.