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Customer Services Department

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Contact details

The Minor Injuries Units are open every day of the year, including Bank Holidays.

Minor Injuries Unit Cumberland Centre

Damerel Close
Plymouth
PL1 4JZ

Tel: 01752 434390

Opening times: 8:30am - 9pm

Minor Injuries Unit South Hams Hospital

Plymouth Road
Kingsbridge
TQ7 1AT

Tel: 01548 852349

Opening times: 9am - 5pm

Minor Injuries Unit Tavistock Hospital

Spring Hill
Tavistock
PL19 8LD

Tel: 01822 612233

Opening times: 8am - 10pm

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Foot and Ankle Injuries Advice Leaflet



Minor Injuries Unit

Cumberland Centre
South Hams Hospital
Tavistock Hospital

You have a soft tissue injury - also known as a strain or sprain.

What is a sprain?

A sprain is an injury to a ligament. Ligaments are strong tissues around joints which attach bones together. They give support to joints. A ligament can be injured, usually by being stretched during a sudden pull. Ligaments around the ankle are the ones most commonly sprained.

A damaged ligament causes inflammation, swelling and bleeding (bruising) around the affected joint. Movement of the ankle joint is painful when you have a sprained ankle.

Have I broken anything?

No, you haven't broken any bones in your ankle. The Nurse Practitioner may or may not have requested an X-ray. If not, do not worry. It is not always necessary.

What is the aim of treatment?

Usually, the damaged ligament heals itself over time. Some scar tissue may be produced where there has been tearing of tissues. The main aims of treatment are to keep inflammation, swelling and pain to a minimum, and be able to use the ankle joint normally again as quickly as possible.

What is the treatment of a sprain?

For the first 48 - 72 hours, think of:

RICE - Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation
Do no **HARM** - no Heat, Alcohol, Running or Massage

REST the ankle joint for 48 - 72 hours following injury.

ICE should be applied as soon as possible after the injury for 10 - 30 minutes. Less than 10 minutes may have little effect. More than 30 minutes may cause damage to the skin. Make an ice pack by wrapping ice cubes in a plastic bag or towel (do not put ice directly onto skin as it may cause an ice burn). A bag of frozen peas is an alternative. Gently press the ice pack onto the injured part. The cold from the ice is thought to reduce blood flow to the damaged ligament. This may limit pain and inflammation. After the first application, some doctors recommend reapplying ice for 10 minutes every 2 hours (during the day) for the first 48 - 72 hours. Do not leave ice on while asleep.

COMPRESSION with a bandage may help if there is lots of swelling. A tubular compression bandage may be given but should be removed at night by easing it off gradually. Put on again before you get out of bed in the morning. Mild pressure that is not too uncomfortable or too tight, and does not stop blood flow, is ideal. Depending on the amount of swelling you may be advised to remove the bandage for good after 48 hours. This is because the bandage may limit movement of the joint which should normally be moving more freely after this time. However, bandages are sometimes kept on for longer to help keep swelling down and to keep the joint more comfortable.

ELEVATION aims to limit and reduce swelling. For example, keep the foot up on a chair to at least hip level when you are sitting. It may be easier to lie on a sofa and to put your foot on some cushions. When you are in bed, put your foot on a pillow.

Do no HARM for 72 hours after injury

Heat: Heat should be avoided when inflammation is developing as heat encourages blood flow. After 72 hours you may use heat, which can then be soothing.

Alcohol: Avoid as this can increase bleeding and swelling, and decrease healing.

Running / sport: May cause further damage.

Massage: May increase bleeding and swelling but, as with heat, massage may be beneficial after 72 hours.

Should I take painkillers?

Try whichever painkillers you would normally take for a headache. If you follow the advice in this leaflet the pain should begin to ease, but it may take a while. You may not be walking on your leg properly for a couple of weeks.

Should I exercise my ankle?

After the first couple of days of RICE you may begin to exercise it - this may be painful at first. These exercises should help reduce the swelling and prevent stiffness:

- Point your toes and feet, and then bring them back towards you
- Keeping your heel still, move your foot from left to right
- Circle your foot clockwise and anticlockwise

As soon as possible you should try to walk properly wearing good supportive shoes - not high heels, sandals / dolly shoes or flip flops.

Avoid any strenuous walking, running or sport until you can do all the exercises without pain - it may take 4 - 6 weeks.

Remember it may take a couple of weeks for the pain to disappear. If there is no improvement within this time please return to the MIU or your GP.