Ankle Sprain

An ankle sprain is an injury to the ligaments that hold the ankle joint together.

CAUSE

The injury is usually caused by a fall or by twisting the ankle. It is important to tell your caregiver how the injury occurred and whether or not you were able to walk immediately after the injury.

SYMPTOMS

Pain is the primary symptom. It may be present at rest or only when you are trying to stand or walk. The ankle will likely be swollen. Bruising may develop immediately or after 1 or 2 days. It may be difficult or impossible to stand or walk. This depends on the severity of the sprain.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver can determine if a sprain has occurred based on the accident details and on examination of your ankle. Examination will include pressing and squeezing areas of the foot and ankle. Your caregiver will try to move the ankle in certain ways. X-rays may be used to be sure a bone was not broken, or that the ligament did not pull off of a bone (*avulsion*). There are standard guidelines that can reliably determine if an x-ray is needed.

RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

A person who has sprained their ankle will be more prone to a repeat sprain. Long term pain with standing or walking or difficulty walking (*chronic instability* of the ankle) may result from an ankle sprain.

TREATMENT

Rest, ice, elevation, and compression are the basic modes of treatment (see home care instructions, below). Certain types of braces can help stabilize the ankle and allow early return to walking. Your caregiver can make a recommendation for this. Medication may be recommended for pain. You may be referred to an orthopedist or a physical therapist for certain types of severe sprains.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Apply ice to the sore area for 15 to 20 minutes four times per day. Do this while you are awake for the first 2 days, or as directed. This can be stopped when the swelling goes away. Put the ice in a plastic bag and place a towel between the bag of ice and your skin.
- Keep your leg elevated when possible to lessen swelling.
- If your caregiver recommends crutches, use them as instructed with a non-weight bearing cast for 1 week. Then, you may walk on your ankle as the pain allows, or as instructed. Gradually, put weight on the affected ankle. Continue to use crutches or cane until you can walk without causing pain.
- If a plaster splint was applied, wear the splint until you are seen for a follow-up examination. Rest it on nothing harder than a pillow the first 24 hours. **DO NOT** put weight on it. **DO NOT** get it wet. You may take it off to take a shower or bath.
- You may have been given an elastic bandage to use with the plaster splint, or you may have been given a elastic bandage to use alone. The elastic bandage is too tight if you have numbness, tingling, or if your foot becomes cold and blue. Adjust the bandage to make it comfortable.
- If an air splint was applied, you may blow more air into it or take some out to make it more comfortable. You may take it off at night and to take a shower or bath. Wiggle your toes in the splint several times per day if you are able.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your

caregiver.

- Do not drive a vehicle until your caregiver specifically tells you it is safe to do so.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have an increase in bruising, swelling, or pain.
- You notice coldness of your toes.
- Pain relief is not achieved with medications.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF: your toes are numb or blue or you have severe pain.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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