

Sprains

The most common fitness injuries are “soft-tissue” injuries; sprains, strains, “pulls” and bruises. While the best means of dealing with sports injuries is prevention, accidents do occur, and knowing what to do first can help prevent further damage as well as help speed your recovery. For most “soft tissue” injuries, the first-aid treatment is: **R.I.C.E.** – Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation.

Rest

Rest means restricting movement. As soon as you experience pain, stop your activity. Forget the old saying “No pain, no gain”. Pain is your body’s way of telling you that something’s wrong, so don’t neglect the message. By resting an injury for the first few days, you’ll help stop excess bleeding (internally and externally) and will promote healing of damaged tissues without complications. Sometimes splints, tapes, or bandages are necessary to prevent unnecessary movement.

Ice

Applying cold compresses to soft-tissue injuries reduces bleeding and swelling (caused by “pooling” of blood) by narrowing blood vessels. The preferred schedule for applying “ice” to such injuries is 10 minutes on and 5-10 minutes off. Always wrap ice or compresses in an absorbent towel or cloth; applying ice directly (or wrapped in plastic) can cause frostbite and additional injury. Use cold compresses for the first 24-36 hours following an injury to reduce pain and swelling.

Compression

Compression or pressure helps to reduce swelling and blood flow to the injured area. Apply pressure by wrapping the injury with an elastic bandage. (You can even soak your pressure bandage in cold water before application to aid cooling). While pressure bandages must be tight enough to restrict blood flow, they should not cut off blood flow altogether. If your toes or fingers begin to feel numb or lose their color, loosen the bandage!

Elevation

Elevation reduces internal bleeding and “pooling” of blood in the injured area and helps blood return to the heart more easily. To be most effective, the injured area should be elevated above heart level. Keep the injured area elevated whenever possible, not just during “icing”. Elevation also helps eliminate pain by reducing the “throbbing” sensation caused by blood coursing to the injury site.

When Self-Care is not enough

Seek professional medical attention after an injury when the following symptoms are evident:

- A joint moves very abnormally
- The injury is unbearably painful and tender
- A joint has pain, swelling, heat and redness
- A limb is numb, extremely painful and/or grayish or discolored
- An injured area is swollen and reddish blue
- The injured area is unable to bear weight

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