

Ankle Injuries

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Ankle sprains are common among children and teenagers who participate in sports. Most commonly occurring in running and jumping sports like football, basketball, volleyball, and soccer and in artistic sports like dance, ankle sprains occur when the foot twists inward causing damage to the ligaments on the outside of the ankle – also called “rolling” the ankle. A pop may be heard or felt and swelling starts immediately.

X-RAY IS NOT NECESSARY

An ankle injury that includes swelling, bruising, or difficulty walking should be evaluated by your child's pediatric provider or sports medicine professional. The most important parts of the evaluation are questions about how the injury occurred and the physical exam. If the child's pain and swelling is isolated to the outside of the ankle, even if he/she has pain with walking, an x-ray is not necessarily indicated. Certain types of fractures or breaks in the bone are called “Low Risk Injuries” and are treated the

same as an ankle sprain. These low risk injuries heal in the same amount of time as an ankle sprain. Many times a costly x-ray with unneeded radiation exposure can be avoided when physicians consider low risk injuries in their decision to order imaging.

TREATMENT

Initial treatment of an ankle sprain is protected weight bearing in a pneumatic walker, ankle lacer, and sometimes crutches if it is painful to walk or if the child cannot walk. Ice the ankle and elevate it above the heart for the first 1-2 days or until the swelling has improved. Bruising often shows up in the first 1-2 days following the injury. Analgesics like acetaminophen and anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen can be helpful for pain and swelling. Early movement of the ankle within the first 72 hours can be beneficial and should be discussed with your child's doctor.

Sprains are typically graded 1-3 based on severity of swelling and looseness of the joint. Grade 1 injuries take approximately 2-4 weeks to heal, Grade 2 injuries take approximately 4-6 weeks to heal and Grade 3 injuries can take up to 3 months or longer.

PREVENTION

High body mass index (BMI), previous ankle sprain, increased height, and poor balance have all been shown as risk factors for lateral ankle sprains. The lace up ankle brace has been shown to prevent a repeat lateral injury in those athletes with a prior injury but has not been shown to prevent initial injury. Exercises directed at balance and strength of the hips, lower leg and foot muscles are helpful

in preventing ankle injuries. Children are more vulnerable to injury during rapid growth spurts, so avoiding over-training is important.

Visit [Healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) for more information about ankle sprain treatment and a return to activity/exercise guide. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/sports-injuries/Pages/Ankle-Sprain-Treatment.aspx>

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