

Emergency Services

Sprains, Strains, and Tendonitis

Sprains and strains happen when muscles or ligaments are stretched or torn. Tendonitis is an inflammation of a tendon. Together, they are called 'soft tissue' injuries.

It can take several weeks for your injury to heal. The best way to speed up your recovery is to use the 'R.I.C.E.' method:

Rest, **I**ce, **C**ompress, **E**levate.

Movement of the injured joint or muscle is also important for healing.

For pain, your doctor might suggest medicine such as regular acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin).

Rest

Rest and protect the injured area as much as you can.

Listen to your body. If an activity is causing you pain, you should reduce how much you do that activity.

Ice

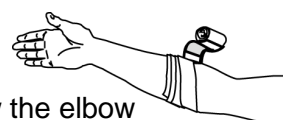
Cold might reduce pain and swelling. Ice your injured area for 15 minutes, three to four times a day, for the first few days.

Compress

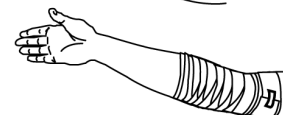
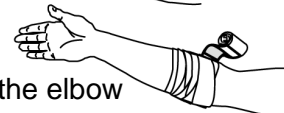
Pressure to the injured area can help reduce swelling. Use an elastic wrap bandage. Start wrapping the injured area from the point furthest from your heart.

Example:

Injured elbow
Start wrap below the elbow



Wrap upward to above the elbow



The wrapped bandage should feel snug and comfortable but not cut off circulation. If toes or fingers start to feel numb, or turn blue or white, the bandage is too tight. Unwrap and rewrap the bandage with less pressure.

Elevate

While you are icing your injury and any time you are sitting or lying down, elevate the injured area to the level of the heart, if possible. Even elevating the injured area a bit helps control swelling. Use a chair, a pillow, or any other support to rest the injured area up on.

Movement or Range of Motion exercises

Regular gentle movement helps reduce swelling, prevents stiff joints, and helps you return to normal activity faster.

Try to do 'range of motion' exercises several times a day. It should not be uncomfortable when you are doing them. Range of motion means moving the injured joint or muscle through its usual ways of moving. For example, if you have a sprained ankle, bend your foot up and down as well as around in a circle.

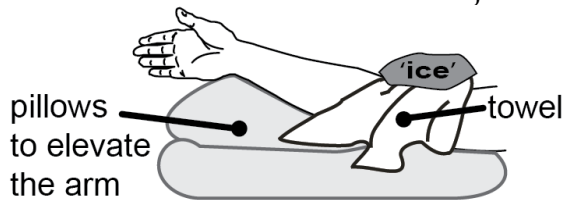
How to 'ice' your injury

You need:

- a towel or an elastic wrap bandage
- something to act as 'ice' (package of frozen peas, bag of crushed ice, bag of ice cubes, soft gel ice pack)
- pillows to rest your injured area on

Using a towel

- Place a dry towel over the injured area.
- Place the ice on the towel over the injured area.



Example: icing an injured elbow

Using an elastic wrap bandage

- Wrap a layer of bandage over the injured area, making sure no bare skin is showing.
- Place ice on the bandage over the injured area.
- Continue to wrap the bandage over the ice to hold it in place.

Never place an ice pack or plastic bag with ice directly on your bare skin. It can damage your skin. The towel or first layer of bandage helps spread the cold while protecting your skin.

Returning to activity and exercise

After an injury, unused muscles, tendons, or ligaments become shorter and weaker. This makes it more likely that you could hurt yourself again when you return to using area.

Before returning to activity, you should be able to move your injured joint or muscle through the full range of motion. You can add exercises to strengthen your muscles as you recover.

Gradually return to normal activity and progress as you are able. For example, after a sprained ankle, a runner would begin with walking and then add running in as they feel able.

A physiotherapist is an excellent resource person to help get you back to your activity. They can guide your therapy and exercises specific to your injury. There is a cost to physiotherapy but it might be covered if you have extended health insurance.

When to get help

See your family doctor if:

- Your injury is still limiting your activity after 7 days.
- The swelling returns or does not go away over one to two weeks.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Fraser Health Virtual Care
1-800-314-0999 or live chat online at fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare
10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at HealthLinkBC.ca