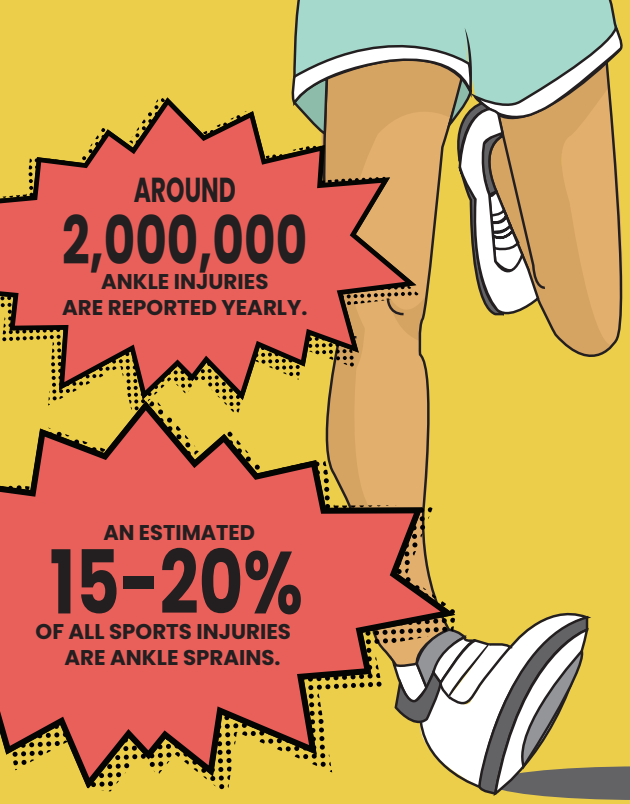


TAKE THE GUESSWORK OUT OF CARING FOR AN

ANKLE SPRAIN

- An ankle sprain involves a tear in a ligament; an ankle strain involves a tear in a muscle.
- A previous ankle sprain raises the risk of another ankle sprain by roughly 3.5 times.
- Depending on the sport or activity, about 20-70% of people with a lateral ankle sprain develop chronic ankle instability, linked to ankle osteoarthritis, less physical activity and poorer health-related quality of life.
- Basketball, soccer, volleyball, football and gymnastics have the highest ankle sprain rates in high school and college sports.

UNDERSTAND THE PHASES

ACUTE PHASE: Usually the first week after injury. Signs include pain, warmth, swelling, redness and/or bruising, and loss of function. Care should ease inflammation, protect the injured ligament and introduce exercises to help restore ankle mobility.

SUBACUTE PHASE: As inflammation eases, the next phase typically begins. It may last up to 12 weeks. Keep improving ankle mobility and start strength and balance exercises during this phase, taking care to avoid injuring the ankle again.

EARLY TREATMENT

Ankle sprains vary. Ask a health care provider, such as an athletic trainer or physician, for a personal treatment plan.

1. Early in rehabilitation, use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for pain relief, along with ice, compression and elevation.
2. Avoid lengthy immobilization; resume movement soon after an ankle sprain.
3. Use a functional ankle brace or tape for external support for up to a year after a sprain.
4. Begin balance and coordination exercises in rehab as soon as weight bearing is tolerable.

LOWER YOUR RISK OF AN ANKLE SPRAIN

1. Know your risk. Prior ankle sprains, higher body mass, weaker ankles and participation in higher-risk sports all increase the chance of injury.
2. Ask an athletic trainer or qualified medical provider to plan at least three months of prevention work on balance, motor control, strength and range of motion. This works best after a prior ankle sprain. Also ask your athletic trainer about adding gait and movement training.
3. Brace or tape ankles for practices and games. Athletes with past sprains who used a brace or tape after injury had about 70% fewer ankle injuries than those who did not.
4. Choose footwear carefully: high-top shoes support ankles more than low-top shoes.

References: National Athletic Trainers' Association, American Journal of Sports Medicine, NCAA | Infographic: National Athletic Trainers' Association (Updated 2023)