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SPORTS

Treat Ankle Sprain Quickly

Editor's note: *Amon Ferry, a Harvard sports medicine fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon who is certified by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgeons, is the new sports-medicine columnist for Republic community sections. He has extensive experience working with athletes and professional teams.*

If you've been active in sports, you probably sprained your ankle at some point. Ankle sprains typically occur when you invert or "roll" your ankle. The ankle is held together several ligaments that attach to the end of the shin bone (tibia), the smaller bone in the leg (fibula), and one of the bones of the ankle (talus). The most commonly injured ligaments include the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL), the calcaneofibular ligament (CFL), and the deltoid ligament. More severe ankle sprains, often termed high ankle sprains, also involve injury to the ligaments between the tibia and the fibula.

There are three basic grades of ankle sprains, mild (first degree), moderate (second degree) and severe (third degree). In a mild sprain, the ligament is strained but doesn't stretch much and recovery is a week or two. Moderate ankle sprains involve some stretching of the ligament but it doesn't completely tear and may take three to four weeks to completely heal. When the ligament completely tears, that is a grade three injury and recovery may be a month or more. Swelling and bruising are common with



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ankle sprains and worsens with higher grade injuries.

Initial treatment includes rest, ice, compression and elevation. To provide compression, you can find an assortment of ace wraps and braces in your local drug store. For ankle

sprains that you can walk on without significant pain, an ace wrap for a few days is usually sufficient. If you are having trouble walking because of the pain, then a hard stirrup-type brace and crutches may be necessary until the pain resolves.

If treated quickly and properly, most ankle sprains heal completely, allowing a safe and early return to activity. Once the pain subsides, I typically recommend a course of rehab with a physical therapist to work on strengthening the muscles that help stabilize the ankle to help prevent future ankle sprains. If you have had multiple ankle sprains and feel that the ankle is unstable, you may have completely torn the ligaments and you should see an orthopedist that specializes in ankle ligament repair.

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