

Immediate Care for Minor Sprains

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Minor sprains are a very common occurrence when playing sports. Immediate care of a sprain is accomplished with the acronym of RICE. RICE stands for **R**est, **I**ce, **C**ompression and **E**levation. RICE started immediately after a minor sprain can help to reduce pain and keep the area from swelling. The earlier the RICE treatment is started after an injury, the better it works.

If you have a major sprain with severe pain you can still use RICE but consult your local health care provider immediately.

An ankle sprain will be used below as the example but all principles can be used to treat any minor sprain

REST: Rest your ankle. Limit the time you spend on your feet and try to avoid any weight on your ankle all together if pain is severe.

ICE: Ice should be applied to the ankle and will help to prevent or reduce swelling. Swelling can cause more pain and will slow healing. You have many options when choosing ice.

Bad ice options: bag of ice cubes or solid plastic ice packs used for coolers. The reason these are not good options is that they do not conform to the injured area.

Good ice options: shaved ice in a plastic bag, a 1-pound bag of frozen peas or corn or a gel ice pack. All are good options because they conform to the contours of the body. Always have a layer between your skin and the ice (pillow case or thin towel).

Apply the ice to the injured area for no more than 20 minutes at a time. You can ice for 20 minutes every hour during the time you are awake.

Compression: Compression also helps to prevent or reduce swelling. Wrap the injured area with an elastic bandage (ace wrap), but not so tightly as to limit circulation. The area should not hurt or throb. A good way to test to make sure the compression wrap is not too tight is to press down on your big toe nail and let go. When you press down, under the nail should turn white and when you let go it should quickly turn back to a red color. The wrap should be taken off every 4 hours and reapplied. To increase the effectiveness of the wrap, a felt horseshoe or U can be used to fill in the area around the malleolus or ankle bone. The horseshoe can be cut out of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick felt.

For a video on how to wrap an ankle correctly use the following link:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il-ieDA7DQg>

Elevation: Elevate the ankle above the level of the heart. The ankle should be elevated so it is 12 inches above the heart to help reduce swelling. Proper elevation can be achieved using several pillows.

If pain and dysfunction does not improve in a day or two you should consult your physician or your local CPRS Physical Therapist. Should you have any additional questions or concerns, feel free to contact the closest CPRS Physical Therapy location via <http://www.cprswb.com/locations.asp>.